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THE NATIONAL GALLERY

BY

J. E. CRAWFORD FLITCH, M.A.
AUTHOR OF "MEDITERRANEAN MOODS," ETC.

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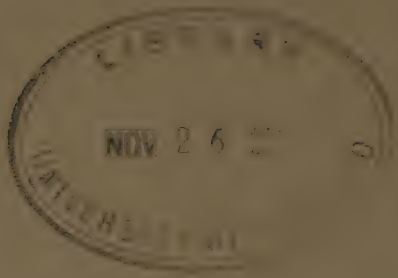

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I

THE FORMATION OF THE COLLECTION

In 1831 some justification existed for Coleridge's sweeping assertion that "the darkest despotisms on the Continent have done more for the growth and elevation of the fine arts than the English government." Most of the great European galleries—the Louvre, the Hermitage, the Prado and almost all the galleries of Germany—had their origin in the collections of amiable despots. They were thrown open to the public by the democratic governments of the nineteenth century, less despotic perhaps, but unquestionably less amiable so far as art was concerned.

The British National Gallery, like most typically British institutions, owes its existence to private enterprise rather than to the initiative of the State. It is said that the idea originated with George IV., but while it would be heartless to rob that monarch of any title to the gratitude of posterity, it seems probable that his claim to

have been responsible for the foundation of the National Gallery has little more basis in fact than his reputed assertion that he was present at the battle of Waterloo. The suggestion of forming a National Collection of paintings had in fact been made towards the end of the eighteenth century. The times were propitious for such a step. Reverence for authority in art was then an unquestioned tradition, and all æsthetic discourses taught that salvation was only to be found in the cultivation of "the sublime." The sublime, as exemplified in the works of the old masters, was at that time however to be found only in the houses of the great or in foreign galleries. Those artists who could afford it, such as Reynolds and Romney, went abroad to begin, rather than to complete, their artistic education. The rest, if they were fortunate, might get a glimpse of antiquity in the gallery of some noble collector. Thus the influence of Van Dyck upon the formation of Gainsborough's style is chiefly due to his study of the Flemish master at Wilton House, the seat of the Earls of Pembroke.

Notwithstanding the obvious need for a National Collection which should rank with the great

galleries of the Continent, no action was taken in the matter, until a fortunate chance gave the Government its opportunity. One of the most famous collectors of the eighteenth century was John Julius Angerstein, a Russian who had settled in England at the age of fifteen and, beginning as an underwriter at Lloyd's, had amassed a large fortune as a merchant and banker. He was a generous patron of the arts and had formed an important collection of pictures under the guidance of Benjamin West and Sir Thomas Lawrence. In 1823 Angerstein died at the age of eighty-eight and directed in his will that the pictures in his house in Pall Mall should be sold. They numbered thirty-eight and included works by most of the great masters—Raphael, Correggio, Veronese, Tintoretto, Titian, Rembrandt, Rubens, Van Dyck, Claude, Poussin, Murillo. They formed in fact an admirable nucleus for a National Collection, and a demand at once arose that the Government should purchase them for that purpose. Sir George Beaumont, the painter, was keenly anxious that the opportunity should not be lost, and while Lord Liverpool, then Prime Minister, was debating the matter, he is reported

to have gone to him and said, "Buy this collection of pictures for the nation and I will add mine." He himself was the possessor of a notable collection of Claudes, together with examples by Rembrandt, Rubens and Canaletto. The opportunity was too tempting even for the most rigidly economic statesman to refuse, and on 23rd March 1824 Lord Liverpool announced to his colleagues that he had decided to purchase Angerstein's collection. Sir George Beaumont kept his word and added his own. The sacrifice meant much to him, for he was passionately fond of his pictures — in fact, he could not bring himself to part with his favourite Claude, and asked to be allowed to keep it in his own possession until his death. A special grant of £57,000 was voted for the purchase of the Angerstein pictures—a sum which seems altogether insignificant in comparison with the amount which such a collection would fetch at the present day.

It was certainly high time for England to begin picture collecting if she was to secure a fair share of the world's art. Already the national, or more strictly speaking the royal, collections of the chief countries of Europe had a start of a

century or two. The collection of the Russian merchant in Pall Mall was, after all, a poor thing when compared with those of the Louvre, the Prado and the Belvedere. Even after considerable additions had been made, Ruskin called the National Gallery "an European jest." But this lateness of time at which England entered into the race was not without its advantages. At any rate the National Gallery began with a clean slate. Had its formation been undertaken a century earlier there would without doubt have been an encumbering heritage of works collected in an age when the history of art was little known and second-rate painters were in fashion. Many of the Continental galleries suffer from such a *damnosa hereditas*. In 1824, however, the day had gone by when Guido Reni was considered to rank with the world's greatest masters and the works of the Quattrocento were despised as "Gothic." The spread of the historical spirit had revolutionised taste in art. Hence it was possible to build up a collection representative of the history of painting on more scientific lines than the older galleries of the Continent, and one which, unlike them, stands in no need of judicious weeding. As regards opportunities of

purchase the time was highly favourable. Competition was not keen and prices were low. America and Germany had not seriously entered the market as buyers. The decayed nobles and impoverished convents of Italy were only too ready to exchange their treasures for English gold, and there was as yet no central Italian government to forbid the sale of the national birthright. Such good use did the directors make of their opportunities that in 1888 Ruskin, withdrawing his remark about the "European jest," pronounced the National Gallery to be "without question now the most important collection of paintings in Europe for the purposes of the general student."

The nation having secured the Angerstein and Beaumont pictures in 1824 had as yet nowhere to put them. They were left, therefore, in Angerstein's house in Pall Mall (occupying a part of the site on which the Reform Club now stands), and entrusted to the care of a modest establishment, consisting of a housemaid, a doorkeeper and two curators, presided over by a Keeper of the Gallery, to which post Mr Seguier, a picture cleaner and restorer, was appointed. The management was unmethodical and ill-organised. Mr Seguier received a salary of

MADONNA AND CHILD

Botticelli

OUR LADY OF THE ROCKS
Leonardo da Vinci

£200 a year for the performance of a number of more or less indeterminate duties, one of which was "to be present occasionally in the gallery," and "a committee of six gentlemen," afterwards increased in number and designated trustees, was appointed to give him such further instructions as circumstances might require. All responsibility seems to have been left nicely in suspense between the Keeper and the Committee. No fund was provided for the purchase of pictures, as all future buying was to be left to the Treasury. The outlook of a gallery whose purchases were to be made by politicians advised by amateurs was not promising. The guiding principle of the Committee appears to have been a determination not to be rash. Their policy proved to be "penny wise, pound foolish." Michael Angelo's Taunton Madonna they might have secured for £500; they offered £250; twenty years later they bought it for £2000. The Garvagh Raphael, for which they refused to bid more than £2000, was subsequently acquired for five times that amount. During the first twenty years of the Gallery's existence, the golden age for buying old masters, only twenty-five pictures were bought. Donations and bequests brought the total of the

collection up to nearly two hundred, but the stream of benefactions diminished as the market value of the works of art increased.

But in spite of their determination to hold to a safe course, the Keeper and the Committee between them managed to steer the institution into stormy waters. In 1845 a commonplace German painting was bought as a Holbein. "The veriest tyro," sneered Ruskin, "might have been ashamed of such a purchase." At the same time a drastic cleaning of the pictures provoked a loud outcry that the collection had been ruined by a too liberal application of soap and water. Thereupon the Committee appear to have come to the conclusion that the best way to avoid mistaken action was to cease from action altogether. This policy was the most disastrous of all. It led to the failure to take advantage of the most magnificent opportunity the Gallery ever had—or probably ever will have—the possibility of purchasing in 1848, for what has been described as an insignificant sum, the whole of the priceless Pitti Collection at Florence, with its sixteen Titians, its fourteen Raphaels, its Rubenses, Fra Bartolommeos, Andrea del Sartos and the rest.

By this time the Government had acquired

some experience of the working of an art institution, and in 1853 a committee was appointed by the House of Commons to inquire into the general system of management and the relations between the Gallery authorities and the Treasury. The result was that the cumbersome system of dual control was abolished and all responsibility for the choice and purchase of pictures was vested in a single individual, the Director. The trustees were maintained as an advisory board, with a view to forming an indirect channel of communication with the Government and to keeping up a connection between the institution and the body of art lovers in the country. But in all cases of difference of opinion between the Director and the trustees, respecting the purchase of pictures, the decision of the Director was to be final. Sir Charles Eastlake, who had already occupied the post of Keeper, was appointed Director for a period of five years, at a salary of £1000 a year. An annual grant of £10,000 was provided for the purchase of pictures.

The fortunes of the Gallery now became dependent to a large extent upon the personal judgment and taste of the successive experts who presided over it. On the whole the system worked

well, although inevitably it has had its critics. Animadversions have been directed against a certain lack of catholicity of taste on the part of the directors, manifesting itself especially in an excessive partiality for the works of the early Italian schools, and a certain indifference to everything that has been attempted or achieved in painting abroad since the beginning of the eighteenth century. This criticism would have more weight if it did not ignore limitations of time and money. With a grant of only a few thousands a year it was impossible in a space of ninety years to form a collection completely representative of five centuries of European painting. It was a fortunate prejudice, if prejudice it can be called, which led the first directors to build up the Gallery upon a broad and deep foundation of the art of the Italian Renaissance.

During Sir Charles Eastlake's administration the gaps in the Italian section were rapidly filled up, one hundred and sixty-four pictures being added in ten years, exclusive of the Turner bequest. During the administration of his successor, Sir William Boxall, the Dutch school received an invaluable addition through the acquisition of the Peel Collection, which was

purchased for £70,000 by the Government. By one glaring blunder Sir William gave a striking demonstration of the fallibility of the expert. In 1866 he bought the picture known as *Christ blessing Little Children* (757) as a Rembrandt, and at a Rembrandt price, £7000. It was not long before the painting was discovered to be by a pupil of Rembrandt, and apart from any question of technique it is difficult to understand how a work so lacking in the force and concentration of the great Dutch master should have been accepted as his without any hesitation. It is probably the worst bargain that the nation ever made.

The present complexion of the Gallery is due principally to Sir Frederic Burton, who held the post of Director from 1874 to 1894. He was more catholic in his taste than Sir Charles Eastlake; Italian purchases still preponderated, but other schools received due recognition. His boldest stroke was the purchase of two pictures from the collection of the Duke of Marlborough, Raphael's *Ansidei Madonna* and Van Dyck's *Charles the First.* The sum paid for the former, £70,000, would hardly be considered sensational in these days, when six-figure prices are not unknown, but at that time it was three times greater than had ever before

been paid for a single picture. The fact is, Sir Frederic had a more exact knowledge of the æsthetic than of the commercial value of painting, and in the estimate which he made for the Government he valued the two works at £115,000 and £31,500 respectively. "I remember once hearing Mr Gladstone refer to this matter," Sir E. T. Cook relates. "His economic conscience seemed to give him some qualms on the score of the unprecedented price. But he took comfort in the fact that, large as was the price actually paid, the price asked by the owner, as also the valuation of the Director, was very much larger. 'At any rate,' he said, with a smile, 'I saved the taxpayers £45,000 on this Raphael, by not listening to the advice of the Director of the Gallery.'" On account of this purchase the annual grant was suspended, and when renewed it was reduced by half, to £5000.

When Sir Frederic Burton retired, in 1894, Sir Edward Poynter was appointed in his place by Lord Rosebery, who took the opportunity of remodelling the constitution of the Gallery. He considerably circumscribed the powers of the Director, practically reverting to the system in force from 1824 to 1853, those years of

slow growth and lost opportunities. Sir Edward Poynter was succeeded by the present Director, Sir Charles Holroyd, in 1906.

The building in Trafalgar Square in which the collection is now housed, designed by William Wilkins, R.A., was begun in 1832, and opened to the public in 1838. Its appearance was subject to adverse criticism from the very first, and certainly it is lacking in the dignity which the importance of its position and its contents demands. The preposterous dome, which was once inhabited by the students of the Royal Academy, and the ludicrous "pepper-boxes" flanking the building, serve no good purpose, either useful or ornamental, and might with advantage be removed or modified. Any serious attempts to alter the façade were postponed owing to the expectation that the Gallery would be removed to a site farther away from the centre of London, where the atmosphere was less smoky, as the Parliamentary Committee appointed in 1853 recommended; but even after this proposal was vetoed it was not intended that the present structure should be left as it is. Various designs have been submitted at different times embodying proposed improvements, but these have all

come to nothing, and it is unlikely that any change in the external features will take place for some time to come.

At first the building in Trafalgar Square housed the Royal Academy as well as the National Gallery. In 1869 the Academy moved to Burlington House, and five more rooms were made available for the National Collection. The number of English pictures however had so increased, through the Vernon gift and the Turner bequest, that the building was still too small to contain the whole collection, and a new wing was erected in 1876, from the design by E. M. Barry, R.A. This addition enabled the English school, which had hitherto been exhibited at South Kensington, to be removed to Trafalgar Square, and for the first time the whole collection was united in a single building. Further enlargements have since taken place, the lighting and decoration have been greatly improved, so that "these melancholy and miserable rooms," as Ruskin called them, now have an air of splendour and dignity which is worthy of the masterpieces on their walls.

In 1853 an elaborate inquiry was undertaken as to the methods of the arrangement of the

pictures in the principal European galleries. Many of the authorities admitted that they had no other system than a general intention to secure harmony of effect. The plan which was adopted at the National Gallery was the satisfactory one of hanging the pictures according to schools in their proper historical sequence. The only disadvantage of this scheme is that the elementary principle of large pictures for large rooms and small ones for small rooms is bound to suffer. It also renders impossible that feature found in some Continental galleries—a tribune, or *salon carré,* in which the choicest masterpieces of the collection are hung side by side. This concentration of the masterpieces of all schools and periods in a small space has its convenience for the tripper, whose idea is to "do" the gallery in the minimum of time, but the system has nothing else to recommend it; for, as Ruskin affirmed when its introduction into the National Gallery was debated, "under such circumstances pictures rather injure each other," and certainly every picture gains in interest and significance when seen in conjunction with the works of the same school which preceded and followed it.

The only alteration in the annual income of the Gallery has been its reduction from £10,000 to £5000. At the same time, since that reduction was made the price of pictures of world importance has increased enormously. The continual absorption of great works of art by national and municipal galleries restricts the supply, while the demand grows daily in almost geometrical ratio as city bids against city and millionaire against millionaire. The £5000 a year which might have been adequate thirty or forty years ago is now insufficient for the purchase of a single first-class work of art. This, however, is not the place to discuss the problems which beset the further expansion of the Gallery. What it will achieve in the future must depend largely on that private generosity which has helped to make its achievements so marvellous in the past.

II

THE CENTRAL ITALIAN SCHOOLS

The underlying assumption in Ruskin's statement that the National Gallery is "without question now the most important collection of paintings in Europe for the purposes of the general student" is that the general student purposes mainly to study the art of the Italian Renaissance. From the Spanish room he can obtain at best but a partial view of the art of Spain; from the French collection he receives only suggestive hints and whispers of the glory of French art in the nineteenth century; it is even questionable whether it is possible to realise the greatness of the English school of portraiture at Trafalgar Square. But the outstanding feature of the collection is the completeness with which the art of Italy is represented, from its first stammerings in the Byzantine dialect to the large majestic utterance of its maturity. And in this extensive period there has been a noteworthy concentration

upon that happy dawning time of the Renaissance, when the world was seen with a kind of childlike wonder, when gesture was fresh and unconventionalised and the but half-successful contest with technical difficulties begot an exhilaration which was lost in the later facility of execution.

The interests of the general student, however, do not altogether coincide with those of the general public. It must be frankly admitted that the predominance of the Italian schools in the Gallery is a little bewildering, and not always quite welcome to the casual visitor. From those who visit the Gallery inspired by a sense of duty rather than expectant of delight it is not uncommon to hear disparaging references to the monotony of "all those saints and martyrdoms and crucifixions and things." From the heights of connoisseurship it is easy to look down contemptuously upon the tired Philistine's rather pathetic confession of boredom, but it has its significance for all that. It is undeniable that the centre of human interest has shifted since the Middle Ages, and consequently the subject-matter of the arts has changed too. The Church, under whose tutelage painting grew to maturity, made a stupendous effort to realise its doctrine and

traditions visually through art. But much of what was once of vital concern to the individual has lost its reality, and therefore its interest, for the modern mind. No one would be ashamed to confess that he finds contemporary politics more absorbing than the records of the diplomacy of fifteenth-century Italian states. Why therefore should anyone be condemned for finding a greater interest in the art which portrays contemporary life than for that which reflects a world and ideals which are remote and unfamiliar?

Necessarily a survey of the Italian schools must prove wearisome to the spectator who looks at painting merely for the interest of its subject-matter. But the subject is merely the skeleton of fact which it is the artist's business to clothe with the living tissue of beauty. Beauty is the one supreme interest in Italian painting, which no revolutions of ideals or intellectual interests can ever diminish. As the present Director of the National Gallery, Sir Charles Holroyd, has remarked, "Whatever qualities other schools may have, and their qualities are many and of the highest interest, beauty is the prerogative of the Italian school, and, since we have practically lost all Greek painting, of that school only." In the

pictures in these rooms it is interesting to trace the growing preoccupation of the painter with beauty for its own sake and his persistent effort to introduce it, if even at times by a kind of subterfuge, into the subjects which his ecclesiastical patrons imposed upon him.

In the vestibule are collected those works of the Trecento, the first brilliant period in the art of the Italian peninsula, in which the national genius is at work breathing life into the rigid traditional formulas of Byzantine art. Necessarily they are not numerous, for the Trecentisti were painters of frescoes rather than of panel pictures, but in point of numbers they compare favourably with those in any gallery outside Florence. Cimabue's *Madonna* (565) presides over this little group in its sombre majesty. The picture has suffered from time and restoration, the face in particular having been damaged by the destruction of the surface painting, which has left the greenish undertones exposed. The pose still conforms to the stiff, hieratic tradition, yet already a tremor of life animates the figure, quivering along the arm to the finger tips. Based partly upon the conventional type of the Byzantine ikon, partly upon sympathetic observation of the

human living mother, the picture is full of dignity and a certain archaic charm. Of Cimabue's greater pupil Giotto the Gallery possesses no original work, but his influence is apparent in many of the works of this early school, particularly in the fine fragment of fresco known as *Two Apostles* (276), a study of two mournfully expressive heads bowed in hopeless grief. *The Transfiguration* (1330), the work of Giotto's great Siennese contemporary, Duccio di Buoninsegna, again illustrates the transition from a petrified tradition to an art founded upon the observation of life. Here we see the stiff figures of the ancient shrines assuming a certain freedom and expressiveness of pose, and beginning to group themselves together in a natural scene. The Byzantine gold background is combined with a rudimentary attempt at actual scenery in the rocky mount.

A century after Giotto, Masaccio reincarnated the genius of the early master in an age more propitious for the arts. The absence of any work from the hand of this great painter constitutes the most serious gap in the whole collection—a gap which it will be extremely difficult ever to fill, as practically the whole of his work is confined to the two churches in Florence for which it was

originally executed. Berlin, however, has managed to secure three examples, and there are still three or four in the hands of private owners, so that there is still a possibility of the gap being filled.

Masaccio was not the sole renovator of art at the beginning of the Quattrocento, for he numbered among his contemporaries Fra Angelico, Paulo Uccello and Fra Filippo Lippi. The Gallery contains one excellent specimen of Fra Angelico's smaller work, *Christ surrounded by Angels, Patriarchs, Saints and Martyrs* (663), a predella detached from the altar which it adorned in the convent of San Domenico at Fiesole and sold by the monks in the days before the Italian government put a stop to such proceedings. The picture is a vision of the heavenly host, radiant as a rainbow, surrounding the risen Christ, who is in a literal sense the source of light. The delicate miniature-like drawing shows the influence of an early training in illuminating manuscripts, while the serenity of all the faces reveals the temperament of the painter, whose ruling sentiment in art as in life appears to have been, "God's in his heaven—all's right with the world."

A whole world of emotion separates this

ANSIDEI MADONNA

Raphael

DOGE LEONARDO LORENDANO
Bellini

glimpse of the departing mediæval vision from the contemporary work of Uccello, known as *The Battle of Sant' Egidio* (583). It is remarkable as being the first Italian work in the Gallery containing actual portraits and the earliest attempt at a representation of a contemporary event. In spite of a certain stiffness, which gives the effect of stuffed figures arrested in the midst of their mechanical movements, the picture conveys a real sensation of the crowd and shock and resonance of battle. Very effective in the midst of the tumult is the repose of the young helmet-bearer, to whose beautiful medallion-like head, by the way, Swinburne in his younger days is said to have borne an extraordinary likeness. A strong feeling for decoration is apparent everywhere—in the long raking lines of the lances (inevitably suggesting a comparison with *Las Lanzas* of Velazquez), in the gaily streaming pennons, in the captain's marvellous headdress of gold and purple damask, and in the burnished globes of fruit and the wild blossoms on the hedge, which form such a happy and unexpected incident in the scene. But even greater than Uccello's fondness for decorative effect was his passion for perspective. The science had then all the fascination of a new

discovery, and the painter could not deny himself the pleasure of displaying his newly acquired skill, as in the foreshortening of the rather unconvincing prostrate warrior in the foreground, and the arrangement of the broken lances on the ground designed to show the mathematically converging lines.

The new spirit which inspired Uccello—delight in science and in the naturalistic reproduction of objects—worked powerfully in the two brothers Pollaiuolo, represented here by the *Martyrdom of St Sebastian* (292). It is obvious that the painters were not particularly interested in the spiritual significance of the subject. The saint is elevated to the top of the picture so as to give greater scope for the display of the fine figures of the archers in the foreground, who form the real subject. Antonio Pollaiuolo was the first painter seriously to investigate the science of anatomy, and he is said to have dissected many bodies in the pursuit of this study. The result of his labours is manifest in the beautiful rendering of the play of muscle in the arms and legs of the archers as they stoop and strain to pull back the cords of the crossbows. A landscape of subtly harmonised green tones leads the eye skilfully back to the remote

horizon. Thus by a division of interest between the muscular figures in the foreground and the delicate beauty of the distant scene, the spectator is induced to ignore that which for the ecclesiastical patron who ordered it was the essence of the picture, the martyrdom of the saint.

Of Botticelli it has been said that we have no alternative but to worship or abhor him. It is certainly a fact that his fame has been subject to remarkable vicissitudes. In his own day his renown stood high—his name alone was mentioned by Leonardo in his treatise on painting; then he appears to have lapsed into oblivion until, in comparatively recent times, Ruskin, Rossetti and Pater began to sound his praises with all the enthusiasm of a new discovery. It is matter for congratulation, therefore, that the National Gallery possesses at least four undoubted works by his hand, together with some others more properly ascribed to his school. Even those who are unresponsive to the peculiar fascination of this painter cannot but admire the *Head of a Young Man* (626), unattractive in colour, but in drawing how expressive.

The *Mars and Venus* (915), which by the way probably has nothing to do with Mars or Venus at all, being an illustration of quite another legend,

is full of the inspiration of the early Renaissance; the drawing is somewhat harsh and angular, but it must be remembered that the picture originally decorated a space over a door in the Medici Palace, a fact which probably had an influence on the design. *The Nativity of Christ* (1034), painted towards the close of his life, in a strain of mysticism and devotion, illustrates in the draperies of the floating angels the artist's marvellous suggestion of movement by means of the expressiveness of his line. But it is in the tondo of the *Madonna and Child* (275) that the individuality of Botticelli's well-known types is most marked. Richter, largely on account of the Child, whom he finds "positively repulsive," is disposed to regard the work as only a school piece, but the weight of authority is against him. Certainly it seems incredible that any other hand than Botticelli's could have invested the Madonna with that haunting look of wistfulness, almost of discontent, the like of which we meet in the work of no other painter. For Botticelli seems to have united a sympathy with the Christian ideal with a regretful yearning for the old pagan past, and he impressed this air of divided allegiance even upon the Blessed Virgin. "He painted Madonnas," said Pater, "but they

shrink from the pressure of the divine Child, and plead in unmistakable undertones for a warmer, lower humanity." Such a Madonna he has painted here, awed by the "intolerable honour" that has come to her. And this perhaps is the reason why these "peevish-looking Madonnas, conformed to no acknowledged type of beauty, attract you more and more, aud often come back to you when the Sistine Madonna and the Virgins of Fra Angelico are forgotten."

The one picture which the Gallery possesses by Leonardo da Vinci, *Our Lady of the Rocks* (1093), has been the cause of some contention, as an almost identical work by the same painter exists in the Louvre. The authenticity of the British version has been disputed by some critics, but the probability is that both are the original works of the master. Here again time has proved to be the enemy rather than the ally of the painter. The ivory-black which formed the foundation of the painting has come through, throwing the whole picture, with the exception of the yellowish high lights, into a profound shadow. The landscape from which the picture takes its title is a curious fastness of fantastic rocks, and has the effect of investing the scene with a mysterious solemnity,

withdrawing it to a remote region which we scarcely recognise as belonging to this familiar earth. The kneeling Virgin rests one hand on the shoulder of the little John the Baptist, while an angel supports the infant Christ. The wonder of the picture is the exquisitely modelled head of the Virgin, with that indefinable expression characteristic of Leonardo's type of woman. It is not an actual smile, but rather a benign light upon the face, which seems to proceed from the possession of an ancient and secret wisdom.

The name of Michael Angelo, "the pupil of nobody, the heir of everybody," stands in the list of the Gallery's painters, but unfortunately only a couple of fragmentary works answer to it, and even these have not passed unchallenged as genuine works. Over the attribution of *The Entombment of Christ* (790) the critics are more than usually at variance. "There is no doubt whatever," says Sir Edward Poynter, "that this picture is the work of the great master." But according to J. A. Symonds "it is painful to believe that at any period of his life Michael Angelo could have produced a composition so discordant, so unsatisfactory in some anatomical details, so feelingless and ugly." The present

Director of the Gallery gives his verdict that "it is probably a much-repaired original that was merely begun by the master, who left it in the condition of outline and wash that we see in the three figures of women and the landscape." And similarly in the case of *The Madonna and Child with Angels* (809) the design has the beauty and grandeur of Michael Angelo himself, while the finish of the hands and feet, and the hatchings of the drapery, are probably the work of a lesser hand.

The Umbrian school, less intellectual but possibly more graceful than the Florentine, is seen to better advantage in the National Gallery than anywhere else except in Umbria's chief city, Perugia. The aloofness characteristic of Piero della Francesca's work, preventing him from being definitely placed within the four corners of any school, will be noticed in his two wonderful pictures, *The Nativity of our Lord* (908) and *The Baptism of Christ in the River Jordan* (665). The *Nativity* has the spell of an impersonal, almost of an unemotional, art, distantly suggestive of that of Velasquez, and also communicating that sense of fresh air special to the great Spaniard. The picture is wholly free from the narrow

ecclesiasticism which oppresses us in many renderings of religious subjects; it has the freshness of an original conception of a singularly poetic mind. In all the Gallery there is no more beautiful group than that of the five angels, with their grave sweet faces, their large resonant lutes, their sober grey-green draperies, rhythmically hymning the new-born Child, while the girlish mother, who has tenderly spread the skirt of her robe on the rough ground for the infant to lie on, kneels in silent adoration.

In Perugino is concentrated all the sweetness, sometimes a rather cloying sweetness, of Umbrian art. His *Virgin and Child with Michael and Raphael* (288) is redeemed from a too soft and dainty beauty by an extraordinarily fine feeling of space which gives the composition placidity and dignity. Everything is hushed and soothing—the air still and soundless, the figures reposeful, the warrior archangel, not Milton's Michael "with hostile brow and visage all inflamed," is clothed with serenity rather than strength.

All that Perugino attempted of lucidity and grace Raphael achieved. First of all his works in the Gallery comes the *Ansidei Madonna* (1171), "quite the loveliest Raphael in the world" was

BACCHUS AND ARIADNE
Titian

Photograph : Hanfstaengl

CONSECRATION OF ST. NICHOLAS

Veronese

Ruskin's verdict after one of his last visits to the Gallery. It shares the distinction with Holbein's *Christina of Denmark* of being the most costly picture in the collection, the price—the curious in such matters may be interested to learn—working out at more than £14 the square inch. The Madonna and Child are less interesting than the figures of the attendant saints—on the left St John the Baptist, clad in rough camel-skin, bearing a crystal cross, rapt in adoration, on the right St Nicholas of Bari, vested in jewelled cope, absorbed in the reading of a book—the two enduring and conflicting types of the Christian saint, the one devotional, ecstatic, contemplative, the other active, practical, scholarly. In the distance are seen glimpses of a faultless little Apennine landscape. From the luminous pale blue sky proceeds a crystalline light which irradiates all the cool pearly atmosphere in the arched portico and gives a telling value to the sparely used touches of colour in the bishop's jewels, the illumiuated missal on the knee of the Virgin, the coral chaplets hanging down on either side of the throne. The seraphic grace of the Umbrian school receives here its complete expression; further than this it could not go. And

therefore, in the late Arthur Strong's view, "the Ansidei Madonna is Raphael's farewell effort, as it were, in a type which he was on the point of discarding as too narrow and too stiff for the growing impulse of his genius."

A more mature work of the master's is the portrait of *Pope Julius II.* (27). The colour scheme is rich but simple, a harmony of red, green and white. The finely modelled head is profoundly expressive, suggestive of a warrior, as the Pope indeed was, who looks back with a stern joy upon the record of his warfare. "Raphael has caught the momentary repose of a restless and passionate spirit," wrote Dr Mandell Creighton, "and has shown all the grace and beauty which are to be found in the sense of power repressed and power at rest. Seated in an arm-chair, with head bent downward, the Pope is in deep thought. His furrowed brow and his deep-sunk eyes tell of energy and decision. The long-drawn corners of his mouth betoken constant dealings with the world."

III

THE NORTH ITALIAN SCHOOLS

THE splendour of the National Collection is nowhere more apparent than in the pictures of the Venetian school. They are as remarkable for their high level of excellence as for their representative character. Of course there are the well-nigh inevitable omissions. Most of all we regret the absence of anything from Giorgione's golden brush save one small silver-grey knight in armour (269), a study for the great altarpiece at Castelfranco, but as only about a score of his undisputed works are in existence we can scarcely repine. There is nothing to represent the pleasure-loving Carpaccio, whose pageant-pictures are one of the chief glories of the Accademia at Venice; the three examples of Tintoretto are only enough to make us wish for more; and from the small designs of Tiepolo we can but guess at the force and splendour, melodramatic though it be, of the last of the Venetians. But for these deficiencies

there are memorable compensations. The little collection of Crivelli's curiously felicitous work is unrivalled for quality and completeness; the delightful series of Giovanni Bellini, every one a masterpiece, is another purple patch; the examples of Titian and Veronese, if not numerous, are adequate; and Canaletto, the painter of Venice itself, is seen here in his happiest mood.

The archaistic methods of Crivelli, who though he survived till the close of the fifteenth century persisted in adhering to the fashion of its beginning, are very evident in the several panels which are built up into a large and imposing altarpiece (788). The massive jewels and ornaments stand out in high relief like bosses, and the cord upon which the solid keys of St Peter depend is an actual piece of string hanging quite free from the surface. There was a certain affectation in this adherence to out-of-date methods, for Crivelli was quite alive to all the innovations of his contemporaries and could, if he wished it, be as naturalistic as any of them—particularly in his representation of fruit and vegetables, for which he had a veritable passion. He loved to pile all the produce of the market garden about the thrones of his Madonnas, giving special promi-

nence to his favourite vegetable, the cucumber. *The Annunciation* (739), an exquisite and curious composition, showing simultaneously the interior of the Virgin's room and the street without, exhibits the painter's almost Dutch delight in depicting intimate domestic appointments. It would seem that the picture had been painted not all to illustrate the Annunciation, but expressly for the sake of the profusion of decorative detail—the rich harmonies of the Eastern rugs, the elaborate arabesques of the cornice and pilasters, the iridescent peacock, the trim little bed with its green bedspread and three embroidered pillows, the careful graining of the woodwork behind, and the candlesticks, dishes and pickle-jars all in a row on the shelf above. "What are we to think of this painter?" asks Sir Charles Holroyd. "Was he always quite serious, or had he sometimes a smile on his face as he worked? he is so skilful in some things, and yet so childlike in others, we cannot quite tell how to take him."

Passing to Giovanni Bellini, we find it difficult to realise that this painter was born in the same year as Crivelli, so much more modern is his method and spirit. His early work, *Christ's Agony*

in the Garden (726) betrays the same profound religious emotion as his Pietà at Milan, beneath which he inscribed a line telling how he worked in tears and anguish for the sorrows of his suffering Lord. It is interesting to note the introduction of the modern feeling for landscape into this picture. The earlier Italian landscape had been a dull convention, untouched by any reflection of human emotion. Bellini however aims at impressing upon it his own personal mood, planning the effect of the lurid twilight sky, the long sombre hill, the bleak plain, to enhance the sense of foreboding tragedy. Landscape is the predominant interest in *The Death of St Peter Martyr* (812), but here in accordance with the new spirit that was coming over Venetian art, the austerity of his earlier work is melted in a sensuous softness and glow. The Dominican general may be murdered in the foreground, but this incident must on no account be allowed to disturb the exquisite serenity of the peaceful woodland scene, glowing in the mellow light of the afternoon sun—for the Venetians are now demanding on their walls neither devotion nor theology, but just beautiful colour. "You see in a moment the main characteristic of the school,"

says Ruskin, commenting on this picture, "that it mattered not in the least to John, and that he doesn't expect it to matter to you, whether people are martyred or not, so long as one can make a pretty grey of their gown, and a nice white of their sleeves, and infinite decoration of forest leaves behind, and a divine picture at last out of all." *The Doge Leonardo Loredano* (189), painted when the artist was nearly eighty, is one of the great portraits of the world. Beautiful as a piece of decoration, with the brilliant effect of the gold and white brocaded mantle against a glowing azure background, the picture conquers by its intense concentration of personality. Did ever the spirit of a man receive more vivid concrete expression than in the face of this astute ruler? —"fearless, faithful, patient, impenetrable, implacable—every word a fate." *The Virgin and Child* (280) is an excellent example of the Venetian type of the Madonna, neither intellectual and contemplative, as in Florence, nor sweet and girlish, as in Umbria, but serene, confident, dignified, the eternal mother, with a neck set firm as a column—"Turris eburnea" rather than "Rosa Mystica."

If the Gallery had included one of Giorgione's

representative works we should have seen a perfect embodiment of the ripened spirit of the Renaissance. After he had charmed the Venetians with his peculiar mellow beauty, other artists were obliged to adopt his method, treating the subject without much care for the elucidation of its actual meaning, but for the sake of evoking a pleasurable mood and producing a richly coloured surface. One of the most successful of these popularisers was Vincenzo Catena. "Upon hearing the title of one of Catena's works in the National Gallery," writes Mr Berenson, "*A Warrior adoring the Infant Christ* (234), who could imagine what a treat the picture had in store for him? It is a fragrant summer landscape enjoyed by a few quiet people, one of whom, in armour, with the glamour of the Orient about him, kneels at the Virgin's feet, while a romantic young page holds his horse's bridle. I mention this picture in particular because it is so good an instance of the Giorgionesque way of treating a subject; not for the story, nor for the display of skill, nor for the obvious feeling, but for the lovely landscape, for the effects of light and colour, and for the sweetness of human relations." Catena's other picture, *St Jerome in his Study* (694), though at first sight

MADONNA OF THE BASKET
Correggio

PORTRAIT OF A TAILOR

Moroni

of less obvious charm, shows the same sort of intention, the evocation by means of soft colour and simplified design of a mood of peacefulness and contentment. Again the subject, the theological labours of the saint, matters little; it is the atmosphere that counts, the brightness of the mountain air, the serenity of the landscape seen through the open window, the spaciousness of the bare clean room—and what a room for clear thinking!

Titian began working upon the same vein that Giorgione had opened out, but in time, while retaining the joyousness of the early Renaissance spirit, he developed a consciousness of the amplitude and dignity of life, which the young Giorgione, dying prematurely at the age of thirty-two, never attained. The Gallery possesses six of the finest works of Titian—all too few to enable us to gauge the capacity of that untiring hand and brain which laboured through nearly a whole century—but though "others may be here in force, Titian is on his throne." And that throne is the *Bacchus and Ariadne* (35), according to Sir Edward Poynter "in its combination of all the qualities which go to make a great work of art, possibly the finest picture in the world." The

scene represents Ariadne by the seashore, deserted by her lover Theseus, when suddenly Bacchus with his rout of revellers dashes up and, enamoured of her beauty, leaps from his leopard-drawn car to make her his bride. It is impossible in words to give any broken echo of this pæan of the joy and exuberance of living. Some hint of the careful thought which for three years the painter gave to this work is conveyed by Sir Joshua Reynolds' sober analysis of a single passage, the red scarf of Ariadne. "The figure of Ariadne is separated from the great group, and is dressed in blue, which, added to the colour of the sea, makes that quantity of cold colour which Titian thought necessary for the support and brilliancy of the great group; which group is composed, with very little exception, entirely of mellow colours. But as in this case the picture would be divided into two distinct parts, one half cold and the other warm, it was necessary to carry some of the mellow colours of the great group into the cold part of the picture, and a part of the cold into the great group; accordingly, Titian gave Ariadne a red scarf, and to one of the Bacchantes a little blue drapery." All of which goes to prove that the problem of knowing when

to put a patch of red into a picture and when a blue one is less easy of solution than it would appear!

The only example in the Gallery of Titian's portraiture is the recently acquired *Portrait of Ariosto* (1944)—the title is probably a misnomer—painted in his earlier manner. The face shows something of that disillusion and scepticism which the Renaissance, with all its noble rapture, brought to the heart of man. The suggestion of pride and disdain is marvellously accentuated by the grand gesture of the arm. The whole costume is reduced to one magnificent quilted sleeve, which shows as clearly as any piece of painting by Velasquez what effect of splendour and voluptuousness may be achieved without going beyond the range of the silvery tones of grey and black.

Paul Veronese is magnificently represented by *The Family of Darius* (294), the greatest historical painting of the collection. Like Shakespeare, Veronese recks little of historical propriety and boldly reconstructs this scene of Greek history according to the pattern of the life of Venice in his own day, "getting always vital truth out of the vital present." The handling of so great a mass of material—the kneeling princesses in the

Venetian costumes of the period, the group of generals, the attendant soldiers and servants, dog, monkey and all, the whole framed in an elaborate architectural setting—presented almost insuperable difficulties of composition; and yet here there is no painful sense of effort, no trace of second thoughts, it is all executed with a superb ease, directness and certainty, recalling as Ruskin has said "the movements of the finest fencer." The principal figures were portraits of the Pisani family, at whose villa the painter had been staying. He left the picture behind him saying that it would defray the expenses of his entertainment. The family let three centuries elapse before they realised their profit on the transaction, selling the picture at last in 1857 to the National Gallery for upwards of £13,000. The four allegorical pictures known as *Unfaithfulness, Scorn, Respect* and *Happy Union* (1318, 1324-1326) were originally designed for the decoration of a ceiling, a fact which the eye must allow for when viewing them in their upright position. Equally decorative is the figure in the *Vision of Saint Helena* (1041), beautiful in its pearl and silver harmonies and reposeful as a piece of antique Greek sculpture.

Of Tintoretto, the last of the great Venetian

triumvirate, we have but an insufficient glimpse in the three of his works which the Gallery possesses. *The Origin of the Milky Way* (1314), a charming illustration of a classic myth, scarcely affords us an example of that poetry of chiaroscuro which Tintoretto brought to perfection, while it displays his determination at all costs to astonish and to be original.

The "Correggiosity of Correggio," a painter working outside the Venetian sphere of influence, is seen in its most fascinating phase in *The Education of Cupid* (10), one of the two pictures which Ruskin said he would last part with out of the Gallery, the other being Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne*. It is an entirely flawless piece of flesh painting, beside which "the best of Titian and the best of Rubens would look oily and yellow." The only other work in the Gallery which can challenge comparison with it in this respect is the *Venus* of Velasquez, and even that work seems more like the prose of a scientific statement after Correggio's lyric poetry of light and form. *The Virgin of the Basket* (23) is a marvellous little *tour de force*, which reminds us of the remark of Reynolds, "If I had not seen it done by Correggio, I should have taken it to

be impossible." The subject which enthralled painters all through the Middle Ages has now finally escaped from the dominion of the Church. Here we have just a beautiful, smiling mother playing sweet games of love with her wayward boy—no more and no less.

Two portrait painters of exceptional talent, who have only just missed a place in the very first rank, Moretto and Moroni, are here seen at their best. With subtle technical skill and sympathetic insight they portray the dignity and refinement of the Italian noble of the later Renaissance—at a period, be it noted, when the Spaniards who now dominated the peninsula had set the fashion for black in dress, in place of the gay colours of a happier age. Moroni is perhaps more at his ease when painting less distinguished sitters. His portraits of a tailor (697), attentive and business-like, and of a lawyer, alert and combative (742), have that special quality which makes what we call a "speaking likeness."

Happily Venetian painting was an unconscionably long time in dying, and the eighteenth century produced some painters who, if they lacked the vast imagination of their predecessors,

were nevertheless very competent workmen in oils. Canaletto and Guardi painted as a fitting epilogue to the school a portrait of the city itself. What a sober and literal portrait it is may be seen from *A View on the Grand Canal* (163). The features of the buildings are recorded as accurately as in an architect's elevation —every brick is accounted for, yet, as Ruskin said, "What more there is in Venice than brick and stone—what there is of mystery and death, and memory and beauty—what there is to be learnt and lamented, to be loved or wept—we look for to Canaletto in vain." Canaletto moreover has been somewhat sharply taken to task for not setting his canvases aglow with all those ensanguined atmospheric enchantments which the northerner, taught by Turner, expects to await him on every canal. But Venice does not always show like a vision in the Apocalypse, and the fact that Canaletto has chosen to render that delicate greyness, born of the sea mists, which so often veils the city on the lagoons, does not argue any insensibility to the beauty of atmosphere, but rather the reverse. In his *View of Venice* (127) showing the Scuola della Carità (now the Academy of Arts), the buildings, as structurally

solid as any buildings ever painted, are visibly swathed in atmosphere. This picture is more than a photographic presentment—it gives us the sense of overhearing the life of the city, the quiet, unemotional, workaday life that is lived year in and year out behind the scenes of that amazing piece of stage *décor* which is Venice.

Guardi was always ready to compromise truth for the sake of telling effects. His *Church of S. Maria della Salute* (2098) looks unsubstantial after Canaletto's enduring stonework, and his desire to record a more instantaneous impression than that of his master led him to fret his picture with teasing little flecks of white. He had the modern eye, if not quite the modern manner, and was perhaps the first to occupy himself with that cult of the picturesque which has spread like a blight over so much of modern art. He hunted diligently for "bits of old Venice," one of which he has snapshotted so successfully in his *View through an Archway* (1054).

An Old Lady

Rembrandt

PORTRAIT OF HIMSELF
Rembrandt

IV

THE DUTCH SCHOOL

"A SERIOUS student of art," says Mr Berenson, "will scarcely think of putting many of even the highest achievements of the Italians, considered purely as technique, beside the works of the great Dutchmen." For the Dutch masters of the seventeenth century, with their sure grasp of realities, their feeling for the humorous and the pathetic in the scenes of familiar life, and above all their tradition of sound craftsmanship, the English amateur of painting of the old school invariably entertained a profound respect. He collected their works with assiduity, and to-day the finest examples of Dutch art in England are probably still to be found, not in public galleries, but in collections formed by connoisseurs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From one such collection the Dutch pictures at the National Gallery are principally drawn. Sir Robert Peel is chiefly known to fame as the repealer of the

Corn Laws, but he has a second title to the remembrance of posterity as a picture collector. The Peel Collection was offered to the Government in 1871, and purchased for the very moderate sum of £70,000—just the same amount as was paid a few years later for the Raphael Madonna from the Blenheim Collection.

Although Sir William Gregory, one of the trustees of the Gallery, in proposing the vote for the special grant in the House of Commons, said that "it was gratifying to see that the taste of the amateur was on a par with the sagacity of the minister," it can scarcely be claimed for Sir Robert that his connoisseurship was of the highest order. But if he lacked an expert's knowledge himself, he possessed the next best thing to it—the faculty of availing himself of the knowledge of others. He was accustomed to employ expert agents and to allow them a liberal discretion. Moreover in forming his collection he laid down the soundest principle that a collector could adopt. In reference to a commission for the purchase of a certain picture one of his agents wrote, "He said that he was willing to give a good price, if a fine picture; and if it were not, he would not have it at any price."

Thanks to his determination to buy only the best and to his scrupulousness in weeding out inferior examples, his collection reached an exceptionally high level of excellence—according to Sir William Armstrong it was "the finest cabinet of Dutch pictures ever collected by an amateur."

Of the seventy-eight paintings which were thus acquired by the nation, fifty-five belonged to the Dutch school. This was a fortunate circumstance, for it did something to redress the balance between the art of the North and the South as represented in the Gallery. Sir Charles Eastlake's policy of concentrating on the fifteenth and sixteenth century Italians had involved a certain neglect of the great Dutchmen. The authorities moreover had felt no special need for efforts in this direction, as it was generally believed that a number of the masterpieces of Dutch art in the hands of private owners would ultimately find their way into the National Collection by donation and bequest—an optimistic anticipation which has not yet been realised.

The Peel Collection included but a single Rembrandt, but as it happened Rembrandt was

the one Dutch painter who was already fairly well represented in the Gallery. Perhaps none of the seventeen of his works seen here shows the master in what has been called his Shakespearean mood; but the two small pictures which formed part of the original Angerstein Collection, *The Woman taken in Adultery* (45) and *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (47), combine a marvellous technical dexterity with great imaginative power. The Bible presents to the painter a literature singularly rich in those passages which concentrate emotion in a single memorable image or incident, and better than any other painter Rembrandt knew how to express the significance of these fateful moments in the terms of a pictorial statement. *The Woman taken in Adultery* admirably illustrates his practice of arranging the contrast of light and shade so as to give the fullest force to the dramatic intensity of the scene. The background of the Temple is full of that magic mystery of gloom in which Rembrandt's imagination delighted—a dim crowd of worshippers, vast columns and a glittering high altar towering up with a vague suggestion of Oriental magnificence. Amidst the surrounding darkness the principal actors in the drama

stand out in the keen emphasis of a shaft of light. The eye is first attracted to the kneeling woman dressed in white, who is the most strongly lighted of the group, next to the figure of Christ, and then passes on to Peter, the Pharisees and the soldiers. Although the scale of the figures is reduced almost to that of a miniature, the characterisation of each is precise and eloquent —Christ serene and understanding, Peter intently anxious to be just, the accusing Pharisee cunningly seeking to inveigle the Master, the soldier grasping the woman's skirt, stolid and impassive, the leering old villain immediately on his left, heartlessly relishing the piquancy of the scandal, and the two Pharisees in the foreground, the one with illumined face gravely appraising the verdict, the other with face averted expressing in his very pose the consciousness of his own self-righteousness. The companion picture, *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (47), is, in the words of Mr Arthur Strong, "A rendering of the scene such as no other man could have given. The dim light, the squalor of the closely huddled peasants, who speak in whispers for fear of awaking the child, the pervading atmosphere of hopeless poverty—all this shows how pro-

foundly Rembrandt must have pondered the real nature and beginnings of that Gospel which the common people heard gladly. The great writer of our day, who claimed that he alone in his century had understood Jesus and St Francis, said: *J'ai un vif gôut pour les pauvres.* Rembrandt might have said the same."

The dramatic note sounded in both these pictures is equally present in the portraits. Here the drama is inward and spiritual—the story of the adventures of the soul. In the two portraits of himself he has painted his own autobiography. In the first (672) we see him, with an expression of self-reliance and keen observant glance, at that critical moment of a man's career when, having surrendered the irresponsible ambitions of youth, he first begins to see life steadily and whole, and to measure its problems and the limitations of its possibilities. In the second (221) he has painted the history of the following thirty years of his life. Though battered by time, the face is essentially the same—that of a man who is at the same time a penetrating reader of life and an eager actor in it. The problems are still unresolved, but age has brought, together with disappointment and

disillusion, a certain temper of acceptance, and we feel that the man who has drunk so deeply of life is able at the end of the feast to pronounce its flavour to be, on the whole, good. "In manner," says Sir William Armstrong, "it is amazingly free, irresponsible, and what in anyone but a stupendous master we should call careless. It looks as if he had taken up the first dirty palette on which he could lay his hands, and set himself to the making of a picture with no further thought. To those who put signs of mastery above all other qualities, it is one of the most attractive pictures in the whole Gallery."

In the remaining portraits may be traced Rembrandt's growing absorption in the rendering of character. The detail of his early work—the delight in the hardness of metal, in the fragility of linen and lace—passes out of the picture; the background is emptied of incident, and even colour itself is all but suppressed, as though too insignificant an accident in the momentous theme he is alone concerned with—the conflict of the soul with fate. Human life is seen against the background of the shadows of destiny. While his grasp of reality grows firmer, his sense

of the mystery which envelops it becomes more acute. For the true realist must of necessity be a mystic, and in this sense Rembrandt was the greatest of realists.

Though essentially a man of his own people and his own time—as every man who is for all peoples and for all time always has been—Rembrandt is separated by an impassable gulf from all other painters of the Dutch school. Realists they were to a man, but realists for whom the most real thing about an object was its visible surface. They lacked the penetrating insight of Rembrandt, which pierced through the outer covering to the romance and poetry that is inwoven with the stuff of common life. The one among them who in spiritual sensitiveness stands next to Rembrandt is his own pupil, Pieter de Hooch, of whose work the Gallery contains four admirable examples (794, 834, 835, 2552). In these scenes, composed of the most commonplace material—the backyard of a house with a housewife watching her servant cleaning fish, another backyard with a woman and child coming out of an outhouse, a woman offering a visitor a glass of wine—he has expressed a serenity and contentment of a quite different

A Dutch Interior

De Hooch

A Man's Portrait
Frans Hals

order from that grosser satisfaction which the Dutch painter too often found exclusively in the insignia of prosperity—thick velvets and furs, massive metalwork, well-stocked larders and prize cattle. He is possessed of an uncommon power of divining those rare, still moments when the scales fall from the eyes and a trivial incident—the gesture of a friend, the attitude of a woman waiting at an open door, the spark of light in a glass of clear wine—discovers some hitherto unsuspected phase of beauty and significance. One such moment he has eternalised in *A Dutch Interior* (834). The picture has a special interest, as it displays the peculiarities of the painter's technique, which has been carefully analysed by Sir William Armstrong. "The more luminous parts of it, such as the costumes of the two men at the table, are painted in semi-opaque colour over a brilliant orange ground. Here and there the orange may be seen peeping out, and its presence elsewhere gives a peculiar pearliness to the tints laid upon it. De Hooch painted very thinly. In this picture the maid with the brazier is an afterthought. She is painted over the tiles and other details which now show through her skirts. Before she was put in, this space to the

right was occupied by an old gentleman with a white beard and moustache, and a wide-brimmed hat, all of which can be descried under the brown of the mantelpiece. . . . Probably de Hooch did not understand how a single coat of oil paint loses its opacity with time, especially when free from white; and so some of his happiest notes have lost their voice. All this process is made use of to get as near as possible to actual illusion in the painting of sunlight." This picture resumes many of the distinctive qualities of the Dutch painters: their delight in the texture of things—note the rich black of the woman's jacket which seems to communicate to the tips of the fingers the very feel of velvet—the depth of their distances—you can walk over the tiled floor right *into* the room and in and out among the figures—their preoccupation with sunlight caught in rooms, playing broadly on bare walls, or concentrated as sparks on the facets of glass and metal—their choice of moments of pause and the intermission of labour in preference to times of action and dramatic happenings. All these features are again present in Metsu's *The Music Lesson* (839)—a subject for which the Dutch painters seem to

have had a special predilection as being most apt to provide them with that note of quiet harmony which they were always seeking. Very characteristic of this northern school is the painter's treatment of light. He does not dispense it with the magnificent prodigality of the Italians; for him, painting beneath the watery skies of Holland, it is a precious thing, to be dealt with frugally, communicating a sense of pleasure the more exquisite as its quantity is the more restricted. The hide and seek of light becomes the central interest in the picture—losing itself in the shadows, finding itself again in the hair of the man's head, on his collar and cuff, in the tilted wine-glass, on the scroll of music, and mostly subtly caressing the pendent earring and the skin of the woman's neck.

It has been observed that Dutch painting succeeds better on the whole with the upper classes than with the proletariat. Jan Steen, the brewer, however, was equally at home in low life and in high, and here we have examples of his work in both spheres. *An Interior with Figures* (1378) presents one of those ale-house scenes which seem to have had a never-failing attraction for the Dutch picture-buying public. As a com-

position it exhibits Steen's familiar weakness—the disproportion between the minute figures and the immensity of the surrounding space, resulting in a consequent absence of focus. The microscopic style of painting is carried to its furthest limits in Gerard Dou's *The Poulterer's Shop* (825), in which every feather of the bird's tail and every hair of the animal's fur is numbered.

The almost complete absence in the Dutch rooms of pictures of historical interest is a witness to the somewhat strange indifference of the Dutch painters to what was most stirring in a singularly stirring epoch. Judging from these pictures we should suppose that they painted in an atmosphere of profound and unbroken peace; in point of fact war was almost continuous with Spain, with England and with France. A notable exception to this lack of interest in the dramatic incidents in the nation's life is to be found in Terburg's *Peace of Münster* (896), perhaps the most vivid presentment of a historical scene in existence. "The *Lanzas* of Velazquez may be the greatest historical picture in the world," says Sir W. Armstrong, "but this Terborch *is* history. The event happened thus, in this room, with all

these people, disposed much as the painter, who was there, has arranged them on his panel." Each of the sixty heads is a highly individualised portrait, and yet the picture is not an aggregate of detached portraits but a single whole, brought into perfect unity by the effective arrangement of the lighting. An amusing story is told of the circumstances under which this picture came to be acquired by the Gallery. It was sold at the Demidoff sale at Paris in 1868, when Sir William Boxall, then Director of the National Gallery, was outbid by the Marquis of Hertford, who secured the picture for nearly £7000. On his death it passed to his half-brother, Sir Richard Wallace. Three years later a rather shabbily dressed individual called at the Gallery with a request that he might show a picture which he had brought with him to the Director. At the time Sir William was too busy to go into the matter. "But you had better just have a glance—I ask no more," said the visitor. Sir William again refused, but the persistent stranger proceeded to uncover the picture and displayed to the Director's amazement the masterpiece of Terburg which he had vainly endeavoured to purchase at the sale. "My name is Wallace, Sir

Richard Wallace," said the stranger quietly, "and I came to offer this picture to the National Gallery." "I nearly fainted," Sir William related afterwards, "I had nearly refused the *Peace of Münster*—one of the wonders of the world."

The Gallery had to wait long for an important work of Frans Hals, and the *Family Portrait* (2285), which was purchased in 1908 for £25,000, cannot be considered one of the painter's most successful efforts. The composition is ingenious; the children are painted with the charm of frank reality; and the brushwork, with what has been described as "a kind of animal relish in the strokes of it," is a constant delight. But the accentuation of the lights on the lace and linen worn by every member of the group creates a rather blotchy effect, while an awkwardness and lack of animation in the central figure—the *père de famille*—communicates a certain feeling of heaviness to the whole picture. The fact is that Hals seems to have been happier when at work upon festive scenes more congenial to his own temperament, such as the groups of jolly burgomasters at Haarlem. *A Man's Portrait* (1251) and the two heads recently bequeathed by the late Mr George Salting give more evidence of

that triumphant ease which constitutes the great charm of this extraordinarily modern old master.

Dutch landscape can be fully studied at the National Gallery in the works of its three greatest exponents—Hobbema, Ruysdael and Cuyp. Of the half-dozen Hobbemas the most original is *The Avenue, Middleharnis* (830), one of the most popular landscapes in the collection. Hobbema has survived the depreciation of Ruskin—"a single dusky roll of Turner's brush is more truly expressive of the infinity of foliage than the niggling of Hobbema could have rendered his canvas if he had worked on it till Doomsday" —for in spite of an intrusive and possibly inaccurate detail his pictures are usually full of a sense of repose and the beauty of design, and in none are these qualities more pleasing than in *The Avenue.* "In fact, this and Vermeer's *View of Delft* at the Hague," said Mr Arthur Strong, "are the great landscapes of the seventeenth century. Nothing can be more direct or uncompromising than the artist's realism. A road bordered on either side with meagre poplars leads straight ahead to where the open sea is suggested though not shown. Whether the artist willed it or not, the scene is eloquent with a

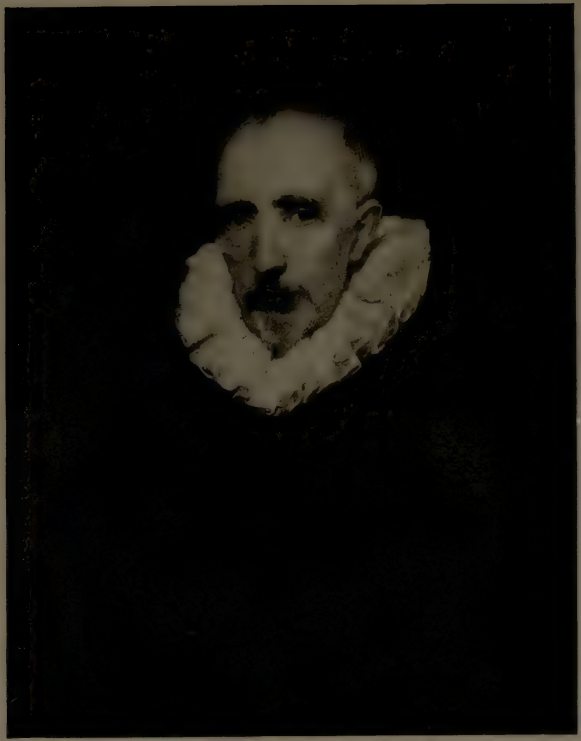
haunting sort of poetry. The monotony, the dull sky, the trees at intervals, picture better than many a professed allegory the prosaic limits and routine of ordinary experience."

Ruysdael, who according to the critic just quoted excelled Hobbema in emotional insight and suggestion, painted, in Ruskin's opinion, merely "good furniture pictures, unworthy of praise and undeserving of blame." He found his material not only in the flats of his native land but also in the wild mountain solitudes of Norway, the scenery with that fatal sublimity which has such a disconcerting trick of looking commonplace on canvas. Here we have typical examples of his landscapes of the waterfall variety and two sympathetic studies of single trees.

Cuyp did for landscape what de Hooch did for the genre interior—he made it a background for the play of atmosphere and light. All his pictures in the Gallery, and particularly *A Landscape with Figures, Evening* (53), and the *Large Dort* (961) show that his main preoccupation was the problem of sunlight in the open air. He confined himself to one single aspect of the problem, the rendering of the golden glow of

THE AVENUE

Hobbema



CORNELIUS VAN DER GEEST

Van Dyck

late afternoon, and, like almost all the Dutch painters, contented himself with reproducing indefinitely the particular theme which he had perfectly mastered.

V

THE FLEMISH AND GERMAN SCHOOLS

The Primitives of the northern schools are less exhaustively represented in the Gallery than those of Italy, but the company though small is select, and comprehends all the great masters —Van Eyck, Memling, Roger van der Weyden, Gerard David, Mabuse. Though the painting of the early Flemings is delicate and perfect in technique, fascinating in its combination of childlike naïvete and profound sincerity, it cannot be said to hold the same place in the history of art as that of the early Italians. It is not merely that the Flemish school devoted itself to expressing "the angular and bony sanctities of the North," while Italy then as always possessed "the fatal gift of beauty." The difference lies rather in the fact that the art of the one marked the end of the old order, while that of the other heralded the dawn of the new. The art of Giotto

was an art of promise, of awakening from the dead, an aspiration towards a new ideal, an attempt to render painting capable of expressing a wider intellectual life, and therefore in a sense belongs to the present rather than the past. The art of Van Eyck and Memling embodied the conceptions of the Middle Ages, and a mode of life that was passing away. With a minute loveliness of its own, it was nevertheless a finished thing, looking to the past rather than to the future, and therefore it had in it no seeds of development.

The first impression that strikes the visitor to the Flemish room is the smallness of the pictures. Fresco painting was an art which could never be acclimatised in the humid atmosphere of the Low Countries. Their painters were obliged by the actual physical conditions of their environment to search for some less perishable medium. This the brothers Van Eyck discovered in a preparation of linseed and nut oils. This medium was favourable to a very high finish, but was only applicable to work on a small scale. Flemish art therefore was necessarily an art of miniature. The second impression which these pictures make is that of a certain affinity with the craft of the worker in metals and precious stones. The Flemish painters

seem to have approached the graphic arts from the point of view not of draughtsmen but of goldsmiths and jewellers. They evince no feeling for line or for broad effects of masses of colour. They care more for elaborate detail, an illusion of hard metallic surface, and sharp points of light like those on the facets of jewels. Their pictures have a richness and sparkle and solidity as though their inspiration were drawn from reliquaries and precious caskets. It might almost be supposed that they were the work of men who had been trained as jewellers.

But whatever their training, their achievement, measured by their technical perfection, can never cease to astonish. The work of the brothers Hubert and Jan Van Eyck is an amazing phenomenon. Appearing as they did, suddenly, without any long line of predecessors to explain them, they seem to have reached the goal of complete mastery of execution at a single stride. "The first Italian Renaissance," says Fromentin, "had nothing comparable to this. And in the particular order of the sentiments they expressed, and of the subjects they represented, it must be agreed that no Lombard, Tuscan or Venetian school produced anything that resembles the first outburst of the

school at Bruges." There is nothing here from the work of the elder brother Hubert, but Jan Van Eyck is represented by that brilliant masterpiece, *Jan Arnolfini and his Wife* (186). "It is one of the most precious possessions of the national collection," says Sir Edward Poynter, "and, in respect of its marvellous finish, combined with the most astounding truth of imitation and effect, perhaps the most remarkable picture in the world." Thanks to his knowledge of the chemistry of paint, the painter's colours are as fresh as on the day he mixed them. The five-hundred-year-old panel is also in a marvellously fine state of preservation, in spite of undergoing many vicissitudes of fortune—it was discovered by General Hay in a house in Brussels where he was taken after having been wounded at the battle of Waterloo.

The merchant, a gaunt and ungainly figure, with an enormous beaver hat crushing down upon his head and a shapeless fur-trimmed gown descending to just above his thin ankles, stands in the midst of a quietly lighted little room, holding his wife's hand in his own. The woman is dressed in a long-skirted gown of a beautifully rich green colour, against which her delicate white hands show like an ivory carving. There is something

deferential and yielding in her pose that suggests the drooping Madonnas of mediæval French sculpture. Though remorseless in its fidelity to fact, there is nevertheless a tenderness in the portraiture, hinting at a certain reverence in the painter for the discreet and faithful relationship existing between these two grave, simple beings. Their own character of discretion and simplicity is impressed too upon the soberly but richly furnished room. Here Van Eyck finds full scope for his delight in minute detail and exquisite finish. The circular mirror hanging upon the wall at the end of the room is a miracle of delicate workmanship. Its convex surface reflects all the contents of the room and also a door showing a space beyond, in which two other figures may be distinguished. Into the frame are let ten diminutive pictures of the ten "moments" of the Passion of Christ, designed no doubt to furnish a subject for the meditation of the lady while engaged in the lengthy and intricate business of arranging her hair and headdress. And all this is given in a space of not much bigger than the size of a five-shilling piece! The mirror, together with the chaplet of beads hanging by the side of it and the brass chandelier, gave Van Eyck an opportunity for

introducing those points of light as seen reflected by metallic and glassy surfaces, the delight in which he shared with all the members of the early Flemish school. The carved woodwork of the chair, the twig broom attached to it, the red hangings of the bed, the strip of finely woven carpet, the wooden sandals, the oranges on the table, placed so as to carry the light into a shadowy corner—all the details are rendered with the same zeal and fidelity as the faces of the man and woman themselves; and yet, in spite of this apparent absence of discrimination, in the general view each falls at once into its own subordinate place, and the effect of the picture, so far from being busy and overcrowded, is one of almost austere simplicity. Upon the wall of the room the painter has inscribed his signature, "Jan Van Eyck was here," a phrase which professes with a fine mingling of modesty and pride his claim to have painted exactly what he saw.

Mabuse was the first of the Flemings to be affected by the influence of the Italian Renaissance. Until lately no important work of his hung in the Gallery, although one of his small portraits, *A Man and Wife* (1689), painted with microscopic detail, even down to the stubble of the man's

beard, is a masterpiece in little. In 1911, however, the Gallery secured the finest example of his first or Flemish period, *The Adoration of the Kings* (2790), from the collection at Castle Howard. The price paid was £40,000 and, great though the sum appears for an example of a master not in the very first rank, it is said that the vendor, Lady Carlisle, refused an offer of double this amount made by a private collector. The picture has been described by Mr D. S. MacColl as "a cold-hearted capable piece of picture making." Certainly the subject has been presented with more inwardness of devotional feeling, but never with greater richness of invention and more indefatigable minuteness of handling. The characteristic Flemish delight in the painting of jewels and precious embroideries is very marked, and indeed the painter appears to have been so intent upon giving the kings gorgeous raiment that he has neglected to give them character. The two kings, standing on either side of the group, have scarcely more vitality or expression than a tailor's dummy, and seem to exist merely for the sake of their brocaded costumes and the fantastically designed Gothic jewellery of their crowns and of the cups which they bring as presents. The background is an

JAN ARNOLFINI AND HIS WIFE

Jan Van Eyck

CHAPEAU DE POIL

Rubens

elaborate scheme of ruined architecture, already betraying the Italian influence. Perhaps the most successful feature of the picture is the group of large angels overhead, and particularly happy in conception is the flight of lesser angels flocking like birds from the remote distances of the skies.

No greater contrast in art could be conceived than that between the meticulous, patient brushwork of these early Flemish masters and the large, summary, exuberant manner of their great successor, Peter Paul Rubens. Some fifteen hundred canvases represent the fruit of his prolific genius—not to mention the innumerable productions of his pupils, of which he usually supplied the design and added the finishing touches—and of these the National Gallery possesses about a dozen superb examples, including, as well as his characteristic historical and allegorical compositions, specimens of his work in landscape and portraiture. *The Abduction of the Sabine Women* (38) shows the master in the plenitude of his amazing vigour. The moment chosen for illustration is that when Romulus gave the signal for the Roman soldiers to kidnap the daughters of the Sabines, and the scene represents a tumult of human forms—muscular

frames of warriors in steel black armour, and resisting figures of handsome women, not Sabines but pure-blooded Flemings, with dazzling arms and shoulders, clad in the sumptuous silks and velvets of sixteenth-century costumes. "A miracle of agitation," so R. A. M. Stevenson describes it, "a flush tide of the richest colour, which positively seems to boil up in swirling eddies of harmonious form. Its whole surface is swept by lines which rush each other on like the rapid successive entrances of an excited *stretto*, till the violent movement seems to undulate the entire pattern of the picture." The same exuberant energy and *joie de vivre* animate *The Triumph of Silenus* (853), in which the jolly drunkard, a mass of "too too solid flesh," is borne along by a rollicking crew of laughing nymphs and leering satyrs. These works constitute a kind of rhetoric in painting, an eloquent and sonorous language issuing in fluent and glowing periods, which perhaps the painter had learned to adopt in the execution of those mural decorations for halls and palaces where he had to raise his voice, as it were, in order to make himself heard throughout a vast space. They are the works too of a man painting in haste,

with whom there was scarcely a pause between thought and action. For Rubens was a courtier and a politician as well as a painter, and occasionally assumed the rôle of an ambassador. Sometimes he lent his art to the service of diplomacy, as in *The Blessings of Peace* (46), which he presented to Charles I. when he came to the court of St James's as the accredited ambassador of the King of Spain, with the object of persuading the English king to conclude peace with that country. The picture was sold by the Parliament after King Charles's death for the paltry sum of £100 and nearly two hundred years later was bought for £3000 by the Marquis of Stafford who presented it to the nation. It was possibly while painting this picture that an English courtier asked Rubens, "Does the ambassador of his Catholic Majesty amuse himself with painting?" To which he replied, "I amuse myself sometimes with being an ambassador."

The single portrait by Rubens which the Gallery possesses, the *Chapeau de Poil* (852), is one of the most celebrated and successful of his essays in this branch of art. In general it may be said that Rubens lacked that scrupulous attention, that attitude of deference to his

subject, which is necessary if the painter is to possess himself of the reticent inner spirit which cannot be captured by a seizure of merely external accidents. He makes his women in particular conform to a preconceived type of beauty which we recognise as peculiarly his own. With her full rounded forehead and small chin, her large inexpressive eyes, her ample swelling contours, Helene Fourment, the painter's sister-in-law, the subject of the *Chapeau de Poil*, emphatically belongs to that ideal which consists in voluptuousness rather than grace of form and in a certain seductive charm rather than refinement of intellect or depth of character. Our attention is directed less to the personality of the sitter than to the marvellous effect of the reflected light which plays upon her face. "No one who has not beheld this masterpiece of painting," says Dr Waagen, "can form any conception of the transparency and brilliancy with which the local colours in the features and complexion, though under the shadow of a broad-brimmed hat, are brought out and made to tell, while the different parts are rounded and relieved, with the finest knowledge and use of reflected lights."

The *Chateau de Stein* (66) affords a magnificent

example of the achievement of Rubens in landscape. On the left in the midst of a group of lofty trees stands a country mansion, said to be his own residence, with steep roof and tall chimneys; the rest of the picture is a broad stretch of fertile plain bathed in a golden autumnal light. Perhaps no landscape ever more completely satisfied that delight in sheer spaciousness which the eye always experiences in roaming over a vast expanse of open country. It is moreover an amazing instance of Rubens's power of reconstructing a scene from memory, for this typically Flemish scene was painted, not in Flanders, but at Genoa.

Van Dyck, the greatest of the pupils of Rubens, may almost be claimed as the father of the English school of portraiture. During the latter part of his life he lived in England, was appointed painter to court and received a knighthood from the king; he was the fashionable portrait painter of his age—he painted some three hundred portraits while in England—and from his art the masters of the succeeding century, Gainsborough and Reynolds, drew no little of their inspiration. Of his half-dozen portraits at the National Gallery the most

important is that of *Charles the First* (1172), sold by one parliament after the king's execution for £150 and bought by another in 1885 from the Duke of Marlborough for £17,500. It is the most imposing of the four and twenty portraits that Van Dyck painted of the English king, in whom he found the ideal of the Cavalier type, the dignity and refinement of which apparently pleased him more than the coarser, more energetic manhood of Rubens. The king, clad in armour and carrying a marshal's baton, is mounted on a powerful dun-coloured charger. The contrast with the massive proportions of the animal gives the king's figure an additional slightness and elegance; his bearing is dignified, with a suggestion of disdainful defiance; his expression is one of melancholy, together with a fatal insouciance. Van Dyck, Cavalier in all his sympathies, could hardly help poetising the Prince of Cavaliers, suppressing the obstinacy and duplicity of his character, dwelling only on his grace, his courage, his refinement. Is it merely in the light of after events that we seem to divine in this lonely figure some hint of fatality, a certain air of foreknowledge of disaster, or had the painter himself some premonition

of the tragedy lying in wait for that unhappy monarch?

In the portrait of *Cornelius van der Geest* (52) we see another type, that of the scholar and amateur of the arts, with which Van Dyck was also in special sympathy. It is said that the painter regarded this work as his masterpiece, and carried it about with him to show to his patrons as a sample of what he could do in portraiture. It is the portrait of an elderly man, grey-bearded, with deep-set thoughtful eyes, the face encircled in a ruff. "The eyes are miracles of drawing and painting," said G. F. Watts. "They are a little tired and overworked, and do not so much *see* anything as indicate the thoughtful brain behind. How wonderful the flexible mouth! with the light shining through the sparse moustache. How tremulously yet firmly painted. . . . Not a touch is put in for what is understood by 'effect.' Dexterous in a superlative degree, there is not in the ordinary sense a dexterous dab doing duty for honourable serious work; nothing done to look well at one distance or another, but to be right at every distance."

The German school is conspicuous in the

Gallery chiefly in the portraits of Dürer and Holbein. Until lately Dürer was unrepresented in the Gallery, but the recent purchase of the artist's *Portrait of his Father* (1938) enables us to see him at his best both as draughtsman and colourist. There is always something peculiarly intimate in a painter's portrait of his parents, but in depth of insight and tenderness of sympathy there is none that surpasses this earnest study of a man who, as Dürer himself records, had passed his life in stern labour, had been proved by many trials and adversities, was a man of few words, and peaceable to all, and had won praise from all who knew him for his honourable and upright life. An inscription at the top of the panel records that the age of the father was seventy and that of the son twenty-six.

Holbein stood in something of the same relation to Henry VIII. as Velazquez to Philip IV. of Spain; both painters created their royal masters for posterity, and both monarchs had a just idea of the genius of their painters. Said King Henry to one of his courtiers who had spoken slightingly of the German artist, "I tell you that of seven peasants I can make seven lords, but not one Holbein!" Though no portrait of Henry appears

A Canon and his Patron Saints

Gerard David

JUDGMENT OF PARIS
Rubens

in the Gallery, Holbein's connection with England is illustrated by two of his finest works, *The Ambassadors* and *Christina of Denmark*. *The Ambassadors* (1314) stands next in importance among the master's works to the Darmstadt Madonna. It presents the portraits of two men, standing in somewhat stiff and inexpressive attitudes on either side of a wooden stand, the one the French ambassador in England, wearing a heavy gold chain and clad in the rich bulky costume of the period, the other the Bishop of Lavaur, enveloped in a sable-lined, long-sleeved gown of mulberry and black brocade. The proportions of both the figures are short in relation to the heads, the effect of squatness being exaggerated in that of the ambassador by the breadth of the coat and its swelling sleeves. On the shelves of the stand are a number of accessories, a Turkish rug, a celestial globe and other astronomical instruments, a lute, a case of flutes and an open music-book, all strongly and beautifully painted, with great minuteness but no confusion of detail. A curious bone-like object stretching across the mosaic floor in the foreground has given rise to much speculation as to its nature and meaning. It appears to be a human

skull seen in distorted perspective, which has been conjectured to be a punning allusion to the artist's name—*hohl bein* or hollow bone. The colouring is brilliant and harmonious, and has retained its freshness quite undimmed by time. The picture, it is interesting to note, is painted on ten separate boards joined together vertically, a fact which may have had some effect upon the planning of the composition.

The portrait of *Christina of Denmark* (2475), the sixteen-year-old widow of the Duke of Milan, was painted by Holbein for Henry VIII., who at one time thought of inviting her to share his throne. Her reply to this proposition is said to have been, "Tell his Majesty of England that if I had two heads I would willingly put one at his disposal, having only one I prefer to keep it for myself." The retort probably has about as much authenticity as most of the *bons mots* of history, although judging by the lurking humour in her face we can well believe that she was capable of it. In the three hours' sitting which she gave to Holbein he secured an imperishable record of a vivid and intriguing personality. She stands somewhat primly, habited entirely in black, with her pretty hands clasped in front of her holding

a glove. Her shadowless white face arrests the attention with an alluring subtle expression which rather baffles interpretation. The patient scrutinising gaze and the quiet smile about the lips hint at a mind busy with its own secret commentary upon the spectacle of life, neither astonished nor perplexed but secure in its own judgments. The face has a subtle suggestion of mobility, as though its present equilibrium of emotion might at any moment be upset by a mood of petulance or laughter.

VI

THE SPANISH SCHOOL

"I CONFESS I have very little admiration for the Spanish school generally," said Sir Charles Eastlake, and consequently we find that of the five hundred and fourteen pictures which were added to the Gallery during his directorship Spain was represented by only three! The fact is that, until comparatively recent times, Italy so dazzled the eyes of connoisseurs that they were more or less indifferent to the glories of the sister peninsula. Marshal Soult was perhaps a little in advance of the taste of his age when, during the Peninsular War, he sent skirmishers ahead of his army, armed with a "Dictionnaire des professeurs des Beaux-arts en Espagne," to identify the most famous canvases, which he subsequently compelled their owners to part with at his own terms. But even had Wellington shown a similar enterprise and lack of scruple, there was at that time no national collection to receive these very covetable

spoils of war. Some endeavour has been made of late to remove the reproach of poverty from the Spanish school at the Gallery, but much still remains to be done. Although not a single work of El Greco or of Goya of any importance has yet been acquired, we should be thankful, however, that we are able to see Velazquez at least as well as, if not better than, in any public gallery out of Spain.

The first in the line of the great Spanish painters, Theotocopuli, better known as El Greco, has been the last in winning recognition. The distortion of his form and the strangeness of his colour have caused him to be regarded as bizarre, and lacking in the primal sanities of great art. It would be impossible to form a just conception of his genius from the two small works to be seen here, although they are sufficiently typical of his highly individual manner. *Christ driving the Traders out of the Temple* (1457) is full of that tumultuous violence and strained gesture which are characteristic of the painter's temper. The portrait known as *St Jerome* (1122) shows the same energy of exaggeration. The gaunt elongation of the face and the emphatic gesture of the hand—the thumb turned resolutely down on the

page of the book—give together an extraordinary expression of defiant and remorseless determination. The type is that of the churchman of all time, or perhaps rather a *reductio ad absurdum* of the type, austere, dogmatic, inquisitorial. Though by descent a Greek, and by training an Italian, El Greco nevertheless expressed more intensely than perhaps any native painter has ever done those qualities of savagery and intransigence that lie but a little way beneath the grave surface of the Spanish character.

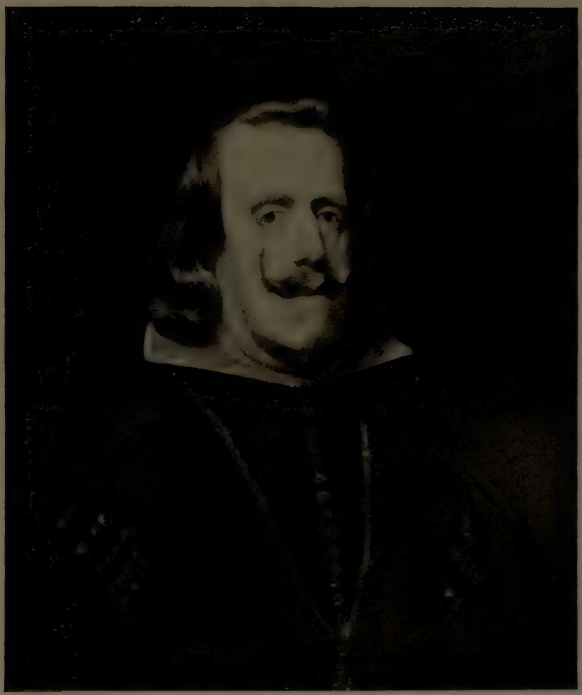
Equally dramatic and passionate is Zurbaran, in his *Franciscan Monk* (230), but in this case the emotion is accompanied by a strong grasp of that material reality which Greco's visionary gaze altogether ignored. As a rule, prayer has been rendered in art with a rather mawkish sentimentality, chiefly expressed by a strained upturning of the eyes; here the eyes are almost hidden in shadow, yet the fervour of the man's soul is as piercing as a sharp cry. Most of the painters who turned out religious pictures to supply the demands of the Church, when the Church was the principal patron of art, probably painted such subjects because they were obliged to; Zurbaran was a religious painter because his temperament would

not allow him to be anything else. The man who painted the *Franciscan Monk* was himself a monk at heart. "He is a Spanish Fra Angelico," says Mr Havelock Ellis, "that is to say, a very realistic Angelico, whose knees rest firmly on the earth." How firmly they rest on the earth we may judge from *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (232), a work formerly attributed to Velazquez. Zurbaran was the son of a small farmer in the province of Estremadura, and here we have a wonderful realisation of the peasants whom he knew and loved so well, with their intentness of expression and their simple direct gestures, offering their country gifts of yearling lambs and baskets of bread. The same directness of vision is seen in the portrait of a *Lady as St Margaret* (1930), joined to a most consummate craftsmanship. All these pictures reveal the vigour and simplicity of the peasant mind, a forthright way of seeing things without any compromise or complexity.

No one can be said truly to know Velazquez who has not seen him at Madrid. His works have travelled little compared with those of other great masters who worked in oils, but of those which have left Spain England possesses a liberal

share. Indeed Justi says that if all the works of Velazquez scattered among the various private galleries in England could be brought together, they would form a collection rivalling that at the Prado. But if the student of Velazquez cannot go to the Prado, without question the next best place for him to betake himself to is the Spanish room at the National Gallery. To be sure the experts have been busy here insinuating their doubts as to whether this or that work is veritably by the hand of the master, and in some cases they must be allowed to have made good their charges of wrong attribution. In the case of *The Adoration of the Shepherds* Velazquez's loss has been Zurbaran's gain. The ascription to Velazquez of *The Dead Warrior* (741) is little more than a pious, or perhaps rather an impious, opinion; Señor de Beruete has his doubts about the authenticity of the gallant *Admiral Pulido Pareja*, and assigns *The Betrothal* to an Italian artist, Luca Giordano; Sir W. Armstrong conjectures the full-length portrait of Philip IV. to be by Mazo; a year or two ago the report that the signature of a pupil had been discovered on the Rokeby *Venus* sent the authorities peering at the canvas through their magnifying-glasses without

DUCHESS OF MILAN
Holbein



PHILIP IV
Velasquez

however succeeding in finding the tell-tale initials. Passing over all these dubious works except the last, which we can on no account surrender, we are left with *Christ in the House of Martha,* admittedly an early work, *Christ at the Column, The Wild Boar Hunt,* together with a sketch, possibly utilised in painting it, entitled *A Duel in the Prado,* the portrait bust of *Philip IV.* and *Venus and Cupid.*

The Wild Boar Hunt (197), though its authenticity is undoubted, has been damaged by fire and restoration. Lord Cowley, to whom it was given by Ferdinand VII. of Spain, sent it to a picture dealer to be relined. In the process the use of an overheated iron destroyed a portion of the surface. Dreading the consequences of his blunder, the dealer was on the verge of despair when Lance, a painter of flower and fruit pieces, suggested that he should put the damaged canvas to rights. He repainted "out of his head" the groups in the foreground on the left and some of the middle distance, and, as he ingeniously put it, "my own style of painting enabled me to keep pretty near the mark." Shortly afterwards he had an opportunity of putting his own pretensions to the test. When the picture was being exhibited

he met two connoisseurs of his acquaintance and challenged them with the remark: "It looks to me as if it had been a good deal repainted." "No; you're wrong there," was the gratifying reply, "it is remarkably free from repaints." A comparison of the restored picture with Goya's copy of it in its original state suggests however that Lance may have somewhat exaggerated the extent of his alterations.

Beruete's remark that Velazquez spent a large part of his time in chanting a hymn to ugliness was probably prompted by the number of canvases which he devoted to portraying the heavy features of the sombre house of Hapsburg and the strange creatures, dwarfs and buffoons, attached to the Court. But for Velazquez, where there was atmosphere, beauty was never lacking, and ugliness was only an ugly name for life and character. Mr Havelock Ellis indeed ingeniously suggests that the necessity of perpetually painting a busy monarch like Philip IV., absorbed in affairs of state and pleasure, who could never spare much time for a sitting, was of advantage to his art, obliging him to adopt swift, simple methods and an impressionistic manner which he might otherwise never have so completely evolved. In the

marvellous bust portrait of *Philip IV.* (745) we have an instance of his method of treating the unlovely Hapsburg facial type, attenuating and disguising nothing, but dignifying it by the force of character and converting it by sheer brilliancy of brushwork into a thing of beauty. Few portraits in the world give the spectator the same certitude of being in the presence of a living personality. He has not only painted Philip IV. in the flesh, the lank, pale hair, the high but unintellectual forehead, the dull and weary eyes, the flaccid cheeks, the ponderous lower jaw—he has painted also the sombre, twilit spirit of the monarch doomed to preside over the decadence of a death-struck empire, with strength and understanding insufficient for his task, bearing himself with a melancholy dignity, all but worn out by that uneasiness which oppresses the head that wears a crown. The portrait seems to sum up in a single poignant image the stifling atmosphere of the joyless Spanish court of the counter-Reformation, and brings to mind that significant anecdote of Philip's father, of whom it is said that once when he heard a man laughing he remarked: "Either he is mad or he is reading Don Quixote!" On no other terms was

laughter intelligible within the gloomy precincts of the Escorial.

The group of Velazquez's works was crowned by the acquisition of the *Venus and Cupid* (2057), in 1906. When the picture was on the point of being sold out of the country, the National Art Collections Fund came to the rescue and raised by subscription the £45,000 necessary for its purchase. It has the distinction of being the only female nude that Velazquez ever painted. Venus, lying upon a couch of silvery-grey, rests her head, which is turned away from the spectator, upon her hand, and looks at herself in a mirror supported by a kneeling cupid. There is here none of the idealistic grace of the conventional goddess, but just the frankly realistic vision of a woman, the beauty of which lies in the perfect flow of the bounding lines of the figure and the exquisite modulations of the back. The picture is distinguished perhaps more than any other of his works by that quality which places Velazquez apart from any other painter who ever lived—a quality of aristocratic reserve, of emotionless detachment, as of one who regarded as irrelevant any personal comment of his own, but was content to state facts with a marmoreal coldness and pre-

cision. Beneath it might well be written : " Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know."

Velazquez stands alone in Spain, for the Spanish spirit is essentially unæsthetic, perhaps even anti-æsthetic. It is concerned with art chiefly as an expression of character and drama. Velazquez never took sides—as Zurbaran, for instance, vehemently took a side when he painted his passionate monk in prayer. He is apathetic to everything except beauty. And that beauty he found first and last in the silvery ambience of the atmosphere, that great lustrating element which purifies every object that it touches. But to understand how he realised this beauty it is necessary to stand in that little room in the Prado in which is hung the miracle of *Las Meniñas.*

As the fame of Velazquez has increased that of Murillo has decreased. In critical as well as popular estimation he once stood at the head of the Spanish school. His canvases were the favourite spoils of Marshal Soult in the Peninsular War. Nowadays when the first commandment which the high priests of art criticism impose upon artists is written " Thou shalt not be sentimental," he has been degraded nearly to

the level of Greuze, and in the reaction against the facile picturesqueness of his work many of its genuine pictorial qualities have been overlooked. The National Gallery possesses no specimen of those "Conceptions," types of "gipsy Madonnahood" as Ruskin called them, which formed his speciality. But these apotheoses of "pretty peasant girls, posing in beautiful robes that do not belong to them, and simulating ecstatic emotions they have never felt," are of less solid worth than his frankly secular scenes of the peasant life of Andalusia. No better example of these could be found than *A Boy Drinking* (1286), which is almost free from the very self-conscious picturesqueness of most of his beggar boys. There is all of what we understand by the South in this picture, its rich sun-stained colour, its eager sensuous delight, its mingling of animation with sleepy indolence. Murillo's naturalism has here had free play; the gesture of the lifted hand and arm is finely observed, and the luminous black, squat-shouldered bottle, imprisoning the luscious vintage of Seville, "cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth," is painted with a manifest gusto. It is a bottle of character, a bottle with a soul!

The two portraits and two studies by Goya suggest rather than display the many-sided genius of the last of the great Spaniards. The sketches entitled *The Picnic* and *The Bewitched* (1471, 1472) show him in his gay and fantastic moods. His unflinching realism and power of penetration is revealed in the vivid *Portrait of Dr Peral* (1951), conceived in a delicate scheme of grey. But the individuality of the painter is most forcefully expressed in the *Portrait of Doña Isabel Corbo de Porcel* (1473). Perhaps no other painter could have expressed with the same passion and precision the ambiguous charm of this half-fascinating, half-repelling woman, with her dark dilated eyes, her coarse full lips, her artfully disordered hair, her whole attitude alert, daring, provocative. He has been remorseless in exposing the rouge on her cheeks, the kohl on her eyelids, the belladonna in her eyes. But he has given her something of his own exuberance and throbbing intensity of life. This cynical, almost brutal, vision is as equally far removed from the reserve of Velazquez as from the sentimentalism of Murillo. For a like expression of extravagant energy we have to go back to El Greco, and turning from this portrait to the latter's austere ecclesi-

astic, beneath an utter contrast of type we recognise the same passionate feeling for personality which is at the root of all typically Spanish art.

VENUS AND CUPID

Velasquez

DOÑA ISABEL

Goya

VII

THE FRENCH SCHOOL

THE genius of painting in Europe has been migratory, visiting each of the great Western nations in turn but never preserving its domicile for long. After brooding over Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it winged westwards, dwelling briefly in Spain and the Low Countries in the seventeenth, passing over to England in the eighteenth and finally settling in France in the nineteenth. Thus the latest of the great European schools of painting flourished during the period when the National Gallery was in process of formation. The minds of those responsible for the creation of a collection aiming at being representative of the history of painting must, however, necessarily be directed to the art of the past rather than of the present, and the directors of the National Gallery were too busy ransacking Italy for the treasures of her Quattrocento to take much account of

contemporary achievements across the Channel. The record of French art, therefore, at Trafalgar Square stops short just at the commencement of its most brilliant chapter. In the splendid Poussins and Claudes there are the foundations of what might become an excellent collection of French pictures, but the superstructure still remains to be added.

When the Poussins and Claude inaugurated the renaissance of French painting, the classical ideal was supreme in art as in literature. Nicholas Poussin "studied the ancients so much," says Sir Joshua Reynolds "that he acquired a habit of thinking in their way, and seemed to know perfectly the actions and gestures they would use on every occasion." In his pictures of bacchanalian revels (42, 62) he has captured something of the rhythmic flowing motion and vital gaiety of the Greek bas-relief. He has succeeded in the rare achievement of reconstructing the antique without falling into the academic. Here at last is a classicism which, even if we cannot quite believe in it, warms and exhilarates instead of chilling us.

It is a little difficult for us to understand the immense prestige which the name of Claude

Lorraine possessed for a period of nearly two hundred years. He was judged to be as supreme in the painting of landscape as Raphael in the painting of the human form. Goethe eulogised him as at once the slave and the master of nature. Constable, writing from the house of Sir George Beaumont where he had Rembrandt, Rubens and Canaletto to look at, said: "The Claudes, the Claudes are all, all, I can think of here." Sir George's Claudes now hang with others in the National Gallery and if they have lost their magnetic power over us we can nevertheless feel the charm of these visionary palaces, washed by visionary seas, these avenues of waters with their light-tipped waves, and this calm golden heaven, in which, as Ruskin said, he was the first to set the sun.

It was an immense audacity of Turner to challenge comparison with the painter who was considered at that time to be the supreme sovereign in the art of landscape. This he did in the most emphatic manner, as every visitor to the National Gallery knows who has seen his *Dido building Carthage* and *Sun rising in a Mist*, hanging side by side with Claude's *Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba* and *Isaac and Rebecca*.

In bequeathing this and another picture to the trustees of the Gallery he made the following remarkable stipulation:—"I direct that the said pictures or paintings shall be hung, kept and placed, that is to say, always between the two pictures painted by Claude, the Seaport and Mill." In imposing this condition Turner was unjust to himself. If the whole body of his work be compared with Claude's achievement, the superiority of Turner's genius is never for an instant in doubt, but if the comparison be confined to these two pictures it is by no means certain that the verdict is in his favour. The question is summed up concisely by P. G. Hamerton. "Claude's field was a narrow one. Though he lived long and covered many canvases, he seems to have had but few artistic ideas, and the very paucity of these enabled him to realise them with all the greater perfection. Turner was vast in range and very unequal; Claude, narrow in range, but remarkably regular in the degree of his technical success. Now, what Turner did was this: he, a man of wide range, attempted to contend with a man of narrow range, on one of the narrow man's own private specialities. He invited a comparison between his

seaport with classical architecture called Dido building Carthage, and Claude's seaport with classical architecture known as the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba. The mistake of inviting such a comparison is visible almost at the first glance. The Claude is light, fresh, full of atmosphere, and that lively, inspiriting feeling which takes possession of us when a pleasant breeze and transparent waves invite us to sail out upon the sea; the Turner is heavy, and though, in a certain sense, imposing and magnificent, is entirely wanting in freshness."

The very antithesis of Claude's suave idealism is a realistic little portrait group by his contemporary Lenain, or perhaps more correctly by the brothers Lenain (1425). The peasant woman and her five children are all submitting with painful gravity to the operation of having their likenesses taken, and the result is a piece of painting of charming freshness and the utmost intensity of feeling. Surely no painter has ever surpassed in intimate realisation of child character the portrait of the timid, wistful-looking boy holding the pitcher. In the same vein of realism, which runs through the whole course of French painting side by side with the traditions of academic correc t

ness and courtly grace, is painted Chardin's superb *Study of Still Life* (1258). Just a broken loaf of bread, a black bottle and a small tumbler half filled with wine, spread out on a piece of old newspaper, but seen with what intensity of vision and painted with what mastery of touch. "Oh! it is not colour alone that you mix," wrote Diderot to Chardin, "it is the very substance of the objects; it is light and air that you render." It would seem that these humble and familiar objects had been transformed by the artist's imagination, so that what we see is no longer the mere remnant of a meal, but the eternal symbols of meat and drink—bread of bread and very wine of very wine!

But we look in vain for any glimpse of that gay and glowing aspect of eighteenth-century France which Chardin ignored—the *fêtes galantes*, the *bals masqués*, the pierrots and pierrettes, the intimacies of the boudoir, the affectations of courtly pastoralism. Watteau is absent, though his pupil Boucher shows one picture; absent too are Fragonard, Perroneau, Nattier, and Largillière. Greuze, who held a middle course between the artificial graces of fashionable life and the plain simplicity of the life of the

people, is here with four typical heads of girls, among them the well-known *Girl with an Apple* (1020). "Courage, my good Greuze," was Diderot's counsel; "introduce morality into painting." Unfortunately he introduced sentimentality instead, and that peculiar "horizontal swimming motion of the eyes like a spirit level."

But it is when we come to more modern times that the gaps become more numerous and more apparent. It is impossible to attempt to form from the miscellaneous little collection of modern French pictures even a fragmentary idea of the variety and fulness of French painting in the nineteenth century. Round the walls of one of the rooms of the Gallery we read the inscription: "The works of those who have stood the test of ages have a claim to that respect and veneration to which no modern can pretend." Agreed: but if the moderns may not claim to be respected they have surely a claim to be seen. Taking the names of the chief "modern" French painters who were born before the Gallery came into existence, how do we find them represented? David and Ingres, the chief exponents of the classical school which arose after the Revolution, have one picture

apiece—that of David not half completed and that of Ingres an unworthy sketch ascribed to him with a query. Corot, thanks to a bequest, comes off fairly handsomely with seven works in his later manner. Of the Romantics, Gericault is absent altogether. Delacroix is to be judged by one picture which cannot be said to do him justice. Of the Barbizon school, three examples of Diaz have been presented, five of Daubigny, and one insignificant example of Rousseau; Troyon, Jacques and Dupré have as yet no place. To Millet and Courbet are allotted one small picture each. Fromentin, Monticelli, Puvis de Chavannes are among the absentees. Manet, born in 1833, and Degas, his junior by a year, may be considered to be too modern to claim recognition, but both are already classics and Manet some years ago received the sanction of a place in the Louvre. The dust of controversy still hangs perhaps over the names of the Impressionists, but the works of Monet, Sisley and Renoir, not to mention others, will some day have to be acquired if the Gallery is to reflect at all adequately the development of French art in the nineteenth century. However, a beginning has been made, and for this we must be grateful.

SUNNY DAYS IN THE FOREST

Diaz

HARBOUR AT TROUVILLE

Boudin

The bequest of the late Mr George Salting forms the chief contribution to this miscellaneous little group of modern French paintings, and includes five examples of Corot and two of Diaz. *The Bent Tree* (2625) and *Wood Gatherers* (2627) admirably illustrate Corot's fondness for twilight effects. "Bien! Bien! twilight commences," so he described in a letter the close of a painter's day. "There is now in the sky only that soft vaporous colour of pale citron. One is losing sight of everything, but one still feels that everything is there. The birds, those voices of the flowers, say their evening prayer, the dew scatters pearls upon the grass, the nymphs fly, everything is again darkened." These two pictures with their silvery-grey trees and pale opal-flushed skies exquisitely suggest the hush and softness of that hour when the moths and the stars begin to appear. In the orange cap of the woman in *The Bent Tree* the painter has added that spot of warm colour which he usually made use of to give their full values to the pervading tones of grey and olive.

In *Sunny Days in the Forest* (2058) and *The Storm* (2632) Diaz shows his preference for the less ambiguous hours of clear light or emphatic

gloom. His trees are of a robuster build than Corot's quivering ghostly forms, that seem always ready to dissolve into the encroaching mist—trees firmly set upon widespreading roots, with trunks of thick girth that have a history of years of growth and struggle. "Have you seen my last stem?" he was wont to say to his visitors, and it was the permanent architectural structure of the tree that seemed to interest him more than its changing vesture of foliage. *The Storm* is a vigorous piece of painting representing a wild common with a few stunted wind-swept trees beneath a heavy sky of inky clouds and broken lights—you can almost hear the rush of wind and the first mutter of the thunder.

The National Art Collections Fund has presented a delightful little work by Boudin, the precursor of the Impressionists, *The Harbour at Trouville* (2078), a pool of clear blue water enclosed by two wooden jetties. The painting is clean and crisp, and the whole picture sparkles with a radiant light and gives the very feel of the cool, fresh sea air.

Courbet's seashore, with its pleasant harmony of cool colour, Daubigny's evening scene, with the sun setting behind willows, Fantin-Latour's

exquisite studies of flowers and his sober portrait of Mr and Mrs Edwardes, present a few more aspects of the French school of the nineteenth century.

VIII

THE BRITISH SCHOOL

It has not infrequently been assumed that the English school of painting had no infancy, but sprang full-grown into life, marked by a strong national genius, on the coming of the Hanoverians. Some colour is lent to this view by the general composition of the British rooms at the National Gallery, which only include two works by English painters previous to the eighteenth century: a portrait by John Bettes dated 1545 and another by William Dobson, whom Charles I. called his "English Tintoret." Certainly the native school, dwarfed by foreign influence at the Renaissance and uninspired by the examples of Spain and Holland in the seventeenth century, received little encouragement from English patrons of art. The court from Henry VII. to Charles II. consistently patronised artists of foreign birth—Holbein, Rubens, Van Dyck, Lely, Kneller. But at the same time there was

a by no means contemptible display of native talent, including among others the names of Nicholas Hilliard and Isaac Oliver, the latter of whom painted portraits of Mary Stuart and Elizabeth, George Jameson, whom Horace Walpole styled the "Scottish Van Dyck," and Robert Walker, painter to Oliver Cromwell.

In the National Gallery, which aims at being a historical but not an antiquarian collection, the English school very properly begins with William Hogarth. Borrowing nothing from foreign traditions, Hogarth was English in his strength and in his weaknesses. In the portrait that he painted of himself we can read an epitome of the English character—practical, self-reliant, clear-sighted, kindly and just. His love of animals, a typically English trait, is seen in the prominence that he gives in the picture to his dog "Trump." His view of the intimate connection of painting with literature and morals, another equally national characteristic, is emphasised by the three volumes which he has placed at the foot of the portrait, inscribed with the names of Shakespeare, Milton and Swift.

Lacking the all-pardoning comprehension of Shakespeare and the sublimity of Milton, Hogarth

shows a closer affinity with the caustic temper of the Dean of St Patrick's. It has been urged against him that he was a satirist rather than an artist. Certainly no satire ever penned was more incisive and relentless than his *Marriage à la Mode* (113-118). Hogarth sold this famous series of six pictures by auction in 1750, when they were knocked down to the only bidder for £126—the frames alone had cost him £24! Fifty years later Mr Angerstein bought them for £1381. The series is simply a comedy, or rather a tragedy, of manners in six acts. In the first the ambitious city merchant is seen purchasing in hard cash a title for his daughter and the prestige of an alliance with the house of the blue-blooded, gouty earl. Meanwhile the foppish young lord turns his back upon his future bride and takes snuff with an ostentatious affectation of indifference. The merchant's daughter with equal listlessness divides her attention between twiddling her wedding ring on her handkerchief and listening to the amusing asides of the amiable lawyer. The next scene presents us with a glimpse of the married life begun under such unpromising auspices—the family breakfast on a morning following a night which the earl's

son has spent in debauchery and his wife in gambling, the steward retiring from the scene in disgust with a sheaf of unpaid bills in his hand. The husband is then seen visiting a quack doctor and a procuress, while the countess amuses herself in her dressing-room with the gay lawyer, now on terms of considerable intimacy, and a circle of opera-singers, musicians and fashionable acquaintances. Then follow the earl's discovery of his wife's infidelity and his fatal duel with the villain of the piece, the rascally lawyer. In the last scene the widowed countess is back in her father's house in the city. She has taken poison after hearing of the execution of her lover. Meanwhile the merchant with his habitual prudence is careful to remove the wedding ring from her finger. Thus we are left to reflect upon the awful consequences of a *mariage de convenance*!

"Other pictures we look at,—his we read," said Charles Lamb of Hogarth's work, a criticism quite literally true of this series. In every picture the spectator is invited to scrutinise written or printed inscriptions of one kind or another, which help to tell the story—the earl's pedigree, the marriage contract and the mortgage deeds in the first scene, the bills and receipt and "Hoyle

on Whist" in the second, the ticket for the masquerade on the evening of the duel, the broadsheet giving "Counsellor Silvertongue's last dying speech." The painter crosses the t's and dots the i's of his story, anxious lest you should miss a single one of the details by which he forces home his moral. It is his insistence upon a moral that distinguishes him from his predecessors of the Dutch school of genre to which his work is naturally allied. Their attitude was one of a serene and comfortable acceptance of life, a sensuous delight in the colours and textures and surfaces of things, which rendered them more attentive to the pictorial rather than the emotional qualities of the human figures they chose to place in the pattern of their pictures. But Hogarth was more interested in men and women than in paint, and what interested him most in men and women was character and morals. He aimed at doing in painting what Richardson and Smollett were doing in literature. "I have endeavoured to treat my subject as a dramatic writer," he said. "My picture is my stage, my men and woemn my players, who by means of certain actions and gestures are to exhibit a dumb show."

MARRIAGE À LA MODE, SCENE II

Hogarth

LORD HEATHFIELD

Reynolds

And how vital, significant and instinct with intelligence these gestures are! Could bodily attitude be more intimately expressive of character than in the pompous pose of the gout-ridden peer, acerb and splenetic, in the lounging, reckless indifference of the young lord in the breakfast scene, in the stolid docility of the young girl at the quack doctor's? And was the moment of death ever realised with such intensity as in the husband's dying swoon after the duel? There is never anything artificial in Hogarth's figures, no hint of the model—one and all they are observed from life and bear the authentic stamp of truth. In scarcely a less degree than Velazquez, Hogarth possesses that special faculty of genius which consists in giving to the sitter an air of being taken by the painter unawares and observed in the natural performance of a characteristic act.

If there were any danger of losing sight of the painter in the moralist we have only to look for a moment at the masterly portraits of his servants (1374) and *The Shrimp Girl* (1162) to be assured that Hogarth had nothing to learn from any master of his own day about the handling of paint. Of the latter picture Sir Claude Phillips

has said, "This is a veritable study of nature, *pris sur le vif*, an instantaneous impression of humanity, in a fleeting moment of complete physical activity, which has never been surpassed, even by the most magically dexterous of the higher Impressionists of to-day; and over and above all this, it has a salt savour of the sea, a true national flavour which renders it in its way unique."

From Hogarth, who laughed before Raphael, and said of himself that "he was so profane as to admire Nature before Art" to Sir Joshua Reynolds with his care for the grand style and his insistent advice "Study the old masters," we seem to pass from the real to the ideal. Hogarth demanded the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth—except perhaps occasionally a little manipulation of fact in the interest of public morals; for the industrious apprentice does not always succeed in marrying his master's beautiful daughter and becoming Lord Mayor of London, nor do all *mariages de convenance* invariably end in disaster. Reynolds, however, could be guilty of a little gentle falsehood, "just enough to make all men noble, all women beautiful." But it was his good fortune that

almost all his women were beautiful to begin with, and most of his men noble—noble, that is to say, with that peculiarly eighteenth-century stamp of nobility which speaks the good breeding of the body rather than of the soul.

It is no disparagement of Reynolds' genius to say that he was fortunate in being born in the England of the eighteenth century. Historians tell us that the fortunes of the landed gentry at that time were established upon the humble turnip, the introduction of which, by making agriculture for the first time a highly profitable industry, doubled the landlord's rent roll. The stately Georgian homes of England—seats would be the more fitting term—presiding over the tamed grandeur of their landscape gardens, rose in every county. A stream of pictures and works of art began to flow into them from Holland and Italy. They formed a fitting setting for that society which has so deeply imprinted its characteristics upon English art and literature, a society founded upon a decent affluence, possessing elevated notions of style and taste, inheriting healthy traditions of sport and open-air life, serene, self-confident, decorous, robust. For the class that shared this happy existence

one thing more was needful to complete its felicity—that it should have its portrait painted. And it is difficult to say which was the more fortunate—the gentry in being able to command the brush of Reynolds, or Reynolds himself in finding at his hand the precise material most apt for the expression of his own individual genius.

For Reynolds' genius was not strong enough to sustain the eagle-pinioned flights of the imagination. He could scarcely have breathed with comfort in a more rarefied atmosphere than that of the eighteenth century. Even when his gaze was most intently fixed upon the ideal, he needed to feel the stable and familiar earth beneath his feet. For what was extreme and incalculable in human nature he had no sympathy—the fleshly zest and energy of Rubens was as much outside the compass of his art as the spiritual intensity of Rembrandt. But in the lords and ladies, the squires and squiresses, who flocked to his studio to have their portraits taken at twenty-five guineas a head, he found just that middle term of humanity, which was so exactly suited to his powers of interpretation, a type which combined bodily dignity and grace with a certain limitation, it would be unfair to call it vulgarity, of mind.

As a perfect instance of Sir Joshua's way of expressing the particular facts of life in the general terms of art, take *The Graces decorating a Statue of Hymen* (79). The circumstances that each of the three beautiful daughters of Sir William Montgomery did exceedingly well for herself in that marriage market of the period which was conducted on such sound business principles is here clothed with the graceful sentiment of a classical idyll. The note of reality is deftly transposed into the key of the ideal. The British landscape garden is made for the moment to wear the aspect of pastoral Greece. This sacrifice of local and particular truth in the effort to secure a possibly artificial dignity offended the honest soul of James Smetham. "Oh, that the three celebrated beauties had been winding silk," he exclaimed, "or shooting at targets, or even occupied, as it is said one fine lady who sat to Reynolds, was 'eating beefsteaks'!" But Reynolds always eliminated the beefsteak.

"I will go down to posterity on the hem of your ladyship's garment," said the courtly Sir Joshua, as he signed his name at the bottom of the dress in the charming portrait of Lady Cockburn and her

children. Their ladyships have certainly come down to posterity on the canvases of Sir Joshua. Most of them still hang on the walls of the rooms of their ancestral seats, but in addition to the *Three Graces* and *Lady Cockburn* (2077) the National Gallery possesses those two incomparable types of the eighteenth-century aristocracy, *Anne, Countess Albemarle* (1259), with her expression of command and air as of one whose prestige has never been questioned, and Mrs Musters, *Portrait of a Lady* (891), serene and disdainful in the cold beauty of her classic profile.

Of his portraits of men, those of *Lord Heathfield* (111) and *Dr Johnson* (887) are especially characteristic of that quiet nobility with which Reynolds invested his sitters. The bluff old soldier of the right bull-dog breed who had held Gibraltar for England against all comers stands up squarely against a sky dark with battle smoke, tapping the key of the fortress on his fingers, a very personification of the defiant boast "What we have we hold!" The portrait of Dr Johnson is a psychological study in paint. The mind appears to be concentrated in argument, as though the great lexicographer were bearing down upon some luckless antagonist with a

"Now, sir, what's your drift?" or, "Nay, sir, this is paltry."

The fact that the art of Reynolds was exclusively, and that of Gainsborough primarily, an art of portraiture has tended to keep the bulk of their work in the hands of private owners. Neither of them are seen quite at their best at Trafalgar Square. We miss the *Nelly O'Brien* of Sir Joshua and the *Blue Boy* of his rival. But we are well content to measure Gainsborough's genius by his achievement in the portrait of *Mrs Siddons* (683). In his portrait of the actress as the Tragic Muse, painted in the same year, Reynolds forced the note of tragedy by imposing upon her a tremendous dramatic gesture; Gainsborough paints her in the easy pose of a morning call and lets the tragedian in her speak simply by her presence. Severely majestic, her expression gives credence to the reported assertion of one of her admirers—"One would as soon think of making love to the Archbishop of Canterbury." Yet it is possible to discriminate between the dignity of Gainsborough and that of Reynolds. The dignity of Gainsborough's sitters seems to partake of a more spiritual quality, expressing not so much the consciousness of outward rank

as the secure possession of the inward soul. Moreover usually, as in this portrait, it is misted over with a breath of dreamy melancholy. Gainsborough, who was never so much at his ease in the world as Reynolds, seems to have been sensitive to a note of sadness and regret in human nature which his more successful rival never overheard, and doubtless he lent to his sitters, whether they possessed it or not, something of the colour of his own temperament. We observe it even in the wistful reticent face of the older child in *The Painter's Daughters* (1811), and still more markedly in his portrait of the same daughter painted many years later, *Miss Gainsborough* (1482).

The portrait of Mrs Siddons illustrates in a very individual manner the technical as well as the emotional qualities of the painter. Here again the contrast with Reynolds is obvious. In place of the Venetian splendour and golden glow of Reynolds we have the greenish pallor of the cold keys in which Gainsborough delighted to compose. With this picture before us we are willing for once to go the whole length of Ruskin's superlative and declare Gainsborough the finest colourist since Rubens. The technique

MRS. SIDDONS
Gainsborough

MRS. SIDDONS
Lawrence

is curiously modern, almost impressionist, in appearance. The broad decorative treatment of the striped silk dress; the delicacy of its texture; the refinement of the drawing; the ease and lightness of the handling which give an effect of happy spontaneity; these qualities lend the picture a distinction and charm unsurpassed by any portrait of the English school. Possibly the impression of spontaneity is deceptive, for that the painter had trouble with the face we know from his irritable exclamation, "Damn it, madam, there is no end to your nose!" How far Gainsborough could fall below his own level we are painfully aware when we turn from this brilliant piece of painting to the vapid and uninspired *Musidora bathing her Feet* (308).

To their successors, Romney, Raeburn, Opie, Hoppner, Lawrence, the two masters of English portraiture bequeathed their tradition of style but not their genius. Romney's portraits of *Mrs Mark Currie* (1651) and *The Parson's Daughter* (1068) reveal his skill in a certain swift abridgment of feminine charm. The powdery cloud of hair, the soft complexion, the childlike archness of expression, the free flimsy draperies, all the obvious and superficial graces of woman,

he recorded with an easy, agreeable touch, although at times showing cheap and thin in comparison with Sir Joshua's. But he was unable to penetrate beneath the surface. Emotional rather than intellectual in his outlook, he did not give his sitters character and soul; sometimes, as in the sad case of Mrs Currie, not even bones. For a great part of his life he was, like Nelson, under the spell of that professional charmer Emma Lyon, *alias* Lady Hamilton, "the divine lady," as he called her, "I cannot give her any other epithet, for I think her superior to all womankind." Here we see her as a bacchante in a "vivid sketch, large, streaky, splashy—a successful excited beginning—a rosy-cheeked girl, with golden-brown hair, the head inclined on the right shoulder, the moistened teeth white and a-gleam between red lips—a canvas of cream and rose colour" (312).[1]

Lawrence's study of Mrs Siddons contrasts significantly with Gainsborough's portrait. The sentiment of the earlier picture is here melted into sentimentality. Her melancholy has become more tearful, her austere beauty mere prettiness. Lawrence was essentially the painter of the

[1] F. Wedmore.

Byronic era. His women are ardent, melting, romantic—often in spite of themselves. Even that devout young Methodist, Miss Caroline Fry, had to submit to being gypsified. The young painter was the prodigy of the art world of his age. Lawrence's father declined the Duke of Devonshire's offer to send him to Rome, affirming that "his son's talent required no cultivation." "His studio before he was twelve years old was," we are told, "the favourite resort of the beauty and fashion and taste of Bath: young ladies loved to sit and converse with the handsome prodigy, men of taste and vertu purchased his crayon heads, which he drew in vast numbers, and carried them far and near, even into foreign lands, to show as the work of the boy-artist of Britain." Even his mature work in its extreme facility and lack of depth seems still to retain a suggestion of the infant prodigy. For some justification of his claim to be "the second Reynolds" we must look to his portraits of men. *John Julius Angerstein* (129) is a solid piece of painting which mere cleverness alone could never have achieved.

If, as Ruskin said, the history of English landscape art begins with the name of Richard

Wilson, the beginning was very much of the nature of a false start. He is not so much the forerunner of Crome and Constable as the pupil of Poussin and Salvator. Judging him solely by his works we should scarcely recognise him as an Englishman. He found himself when he found Italy, but he never found England at all. His idea of what landscape ought to be is well exemplified in his masterpiece, *The Destruction of Niobe's Children* (110), in which Apollo, riding the storm, is seen shooting lightnings at a group of cowering mortals. The dignity of a landscape was always enhanced, according to the Wilsonian formula, when it became the scene of mythological activities or classical reminiscence. In treating a simpler theme, such as *The Villa of Mæcenas, at Tivoli* (108), he aims at dignity by forcing a contrast between bituminous, coal-black shadows and an exaggerated, unearthly light. His painting is virile and his colour frequently excellent, but it was his misfortune to lack the simplicity of eye and mind that is content with nature as it is. When George III. gave him a commission for a picture of Kew Gardens, he translated the scene to a Southern latitude and ennobled it with classical architecture. The king returned it

with the terse comment, "It is not Kew." Opinion in general agreed with the royal verdict. Whatever else Wilson's landscape might be, it was not England.

With Gainsborough came the reaction against the classical landscape; in place of gods and heroes, ruined temples and the glow of Italy, merely girls with pigs, market carts jolting along country lanes, cattle drinking at streams, and the cold grey-greens of Suffolk. The change was not merely in the accessories, but in the whole attitude of the painter to nature. Gainsborough did not seek to reconstruct the natural scene on a more noble model; he simply lay in wait, as it were, for the soul of the landscape. In *The Market Cart* (80) we are at the very heart of rural England. Although Ruskin complained that the foliage was put in with meaningless touches which made it impossible to label the trees with botanical precision, there is here a convincing fidelity to the deeper underlying truth of landscape. Still more intimate is the feeling of hushed solemnity in *The Watering Place* (109). It is painted in that same minor key in which so many of his portraits are pitched. Constable remarked this melancholy mood of

Gainsborough's landscapes. "On looking at them," he said, "we find tears in our eyes, and know not what brings them." The *Wood Scene* (925), known as *Gainsborough's Forest*, from the title of the engraving, has a more prosaic character. It suffers moreover from a division of interest between the road and the stream, the perspective of each carrying the eye back in separate directions—a loss of unity characteristic of the English school, which in its revolt against the classical landscape tended to ignore the amenities of composition. And the eye searches in vain to discover the realities which correspond to the reflections in the water.

The acquisition of the *Poringland Oak* (2674) in 1911 completed the Gallery's magnificent group of pictures by John Crome the Elder. He knew trees as a man knows the faces of his friends, and this kingly oak, robust playfellow of the sun and wind, has the close individuality of a human portrait. Loving and understanding atmosphere and light as well as any of the French Impressionists, unlike them he never sacrificed the essential and permanent qualities of objects for the sake of capturing the fleeting atmospheric conditions under which they are seen. But he

is greatest when he surrenders the particular incidents of landscape to a broad summary of earth and sky, as in the large *Mousehold Heath* (689). Here there is no subject but space, air and solitude. Landscape is reduced to its two elemental constituents, earth and sky; but what absorbing, almost dramatic, interest arises from this simple opposition of the ribbed and sweeping heath with the vaporous pearl-pink cloud and the soft depth of filmy blue. Although the scene is precise in its localisation, it is in a sense no longer just Norfolk, but a broad presentment of that primeval earth and heaven between which the life of man is lived. Repose and a reticent dignity it derives from the fine sweep of the bounding lines. Wherever he could draw a line Crome could create dignity. Hence the significance of his death-bed advice to his son: "John, my boy, if your subject is only a pigsty—dignify it." The trace of a long cut is visible in the centre of the canvas stretching from the top of the picture to the bottom. This is the result of the vandalism of a picture dealer who, doubtless thinking that two small Cromes were worth more than one large one, divided the picture into two parts. The two halves were sold separately, but fortunately they

both came into the hands of a collector who reunited them, and thus saved posterity from an irreparable loss.

The magic of Crome is perhaps even more striking in the desolate grandeur of his *Welsh Slate Quarries* (1037), a dreary bare hillside, swathed with drifting shreds of cloud. Grandeur of this sort, springing directly from the simple verities of earth, reduces the artificial dignity of Wilson's *Niobe's Children* to mere rodomontade. Something in the picture—the impressiveness of line, the economy of means, the broad wash of colour—recalls the Japanese, suggesting kinship with that other supreme master of landscape, Hokusai.

"I feel more than ever convinced," Constable wrote in 1803, "that one day or other I shall paint well; and that even if it does not turn to my advantage during my lifetime, my pictures will be handed down to posterity." Time has verified his prediction, for it is safe to say that to-day *The Haywain* (1207) and *The Cornfield* (130) are the best-known and the best-loved of all English landscapes. They touch a chord in the popular affection which few other works can reach. They have an essentially national character. Look-

THE CORNFIELD
Constable

CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE

Turner

ing at these vast breathing trees, at the dewy greenness of the grass, at the blusteriug cloudy skies—"great-coat weather" Ruskin called it—at the brief cold bursts of sunshine, at the clear, sky-scattering streams, we feel that this is just that cool, fresh, robust garden which is England, "this other Eden, demi-paradise." Not only is the subject English, but also the way of seeing it, the representation of it, is marked by certain qualities that we are pleased to regard as typically English, sincerity, independence, vigour—as Constable himself expressed it in homely phrase, "it is without fal-de-lal and fiddle-de-dee." "When I sit down before a scene of nature, pencil or brush in hand," he said, "my first care is to forget that I have ever seen a picture before." The fact that he forgot pictures when he looked at nature accounts for the absence in his own landscapes of that old convention of the classical landscape, the brown tree. It is said that Constable once found Sir George Beaumont in difficulties over a landscape. His trouble was that he could not make up his mind where to put his brown tree, without which tradition taught that no landscape was complete. Constable simply took him to the window and showed him that there was no brown tree in

nature, a fact which he had until then not taken into account. Constable seems to have felt that the study of the old masters might tend to repress the individuality of the artist and perpetuate the tyranny of tradition, and this fear no doubt led him to doubt the wisdom of establishing a National Gallery of pictures when the idea was first projected.

Four characteristic works illustrate the naïve simplicity and truth of George Morland's scenes of rustic life. The best of them, *The Inside of a Stable* (1030), which is usually considered to be his masterpiece, shows his skill in grouping animals and figures in the easy casual positions of ordinary life, and his almost intuitive knowledge of the horse. The extraordinary fluency of his touch gives the picture the freedom and spontaneity of a sketch.

Turner occupies a unique position in his relations with the National Gallery. "We have had, living with us, and painting for us, the greatest painter of *all* time," said Ruskin, in one of his more than usually uncritical outbursts of enthusiasm, "a man with whose supremacy of power no intellect of past ages can be put in comparison for a moment." Turner was not in-

frequently embarrassed by Ruskin's superlatives, but at the same time he had a confident assurance of the greatness of his own genius. The fastidious precautions which he took to perpetuate his own fame after his death show at the same time his belief that he was great enough to deserve to be remembered together with a fear lest posterity might forget him unless he himself took good care that it should not. With this view he left a thousand pounds for the erection of a monument to himself in St Paul's Cathedral, and he bequeathed all his finished pictures to the nation "provided that a room or rooms are added to the present National Gallery, to be, when erected, called Turner's Gallery." Two of his pictures were given, as has already been mentioned, on condition that they should hang side by side with two of Claude's. This bequest amounted to more than a hundred oil paintings and some nineteen thousand drawings. The work of classifying the drawings and arranging a selection of them for exhibition was undertaken by Ruskin. The bulk of them remain in the basement of the building in Trafalgar Square, where selections of them are exhibited in rotation; some are lent to provincial galleries. The stipulation for the addition of a

"Turner Gallery" was in time duly carried out, and in 1861 all the pictures were hung in the National Gallery. Within the last few years, however, a new Turner wing has been added to the National Gallery of British Art on the Millbank Embankment, better known as the Tate Gallery, where the greater part of the Turner Collection has now been removed. About a score of pictures, representing his early, middle and later periods, have been left at Trafalgar Square. *The Boat's Crew recovering an Anchor* (481) and the *Orange Merchantman going to Pieces on the Bar* (501) are examples of the grey-brown sea-pieces of his first period, inspired by Vandevelde and the Dutch sea painters. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (516), a glorious summary of Italy, shows his art in its maturity, when he had given up emulating the older masters and, unmindful of schools and formulas, let the light and colour of the actual world illuminate his canvases. And of his later golden visions of a more dreamlike world than this there remain the *"Sun of Venice" going to Sea* (535) and *Returning from the Ball* (544), their splendour faded, but beautiful in their decay.

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